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**“Soort Soek Soort”:  
The “American Negro” Community in Cape Town,  
until 1930**

Misha J. Charles

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degree of Master of Arts in Historical Studies.

Faculty of the Humanities  
University of Cape Town

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## Foreword and Introduction

I first arrived in Cape Town at the end of a hot and dry summer in 2000. I was a college exchange student, happy to have escaped the frigid New Jersey winter and eager to spend five months in the country I had longed to see for as far back as I can remember. As a young child, I was captivated by a photo with the caption, “an Afrikaner man herding sheep,” in one of my childhood books about world peoples and cultures. At that age where the world— real and fantastic— really did feel like it was only a book away, I often lay on my bed and imagined what the camera had failed to capture in that novel photo of a white man in Africa. Why is he white, I wondered? What did the other “Afrikaners” look like? Are they all white? Are they really in Africa? Why do they call themselves Afrikaners and not Africans? I thought about South Africa so much that I began to draw my own conclusions. At that time, I fancied myself a teacher, and would regularly sit my younger brothers on the floor so that I could teach them geography using the world maps that lined my bedroom walls. I can remember closing each of our lessons by pointing to the southernmost tip of Africa and proudly saying, “look, y’all, this is South Africa. This is the only country in Africa that’s just like us!” Though I cannot say exactly what I meant by “us” and in what way South Africa approximated “us,” I can imagine that my assertion was probably the attempt of a young and impressionable mind to reconcile this photo of a white man herding sheep in Africa with my thoroughly and subconsciously western assumption that white was to modern (dare I say ‘civilized’?) and American as Africa was to black and ‘archaic.’ Surely, I must have thought, an African country with white people must be a beacon of hope in an otherwise desolate continent, a country more like my home in the United States than a country in Africa.

At that young age, I knew nothing of South African history or the oppressive apartheid regime. I had never heard of any African cities, black African writers, or great thinkers. Black people, let alone those in Africa, did not feature in our lessons at school and even though my parents and Sunday School teachers made some attempt to fill the black hole in our education, it was simply too little too late. After all, they too, were products of whitewashed history lessons. As a young black girl in the West, Africa grew dark before I even had a chance to imagine what it must be like. And for we who know only that we are the descendants of African slaves, Africa is both the source of much of our identity, and everything we think we have progressed beyond. By writing “Soort Soek Soort: The ‘American Negro’ Community in Cape Town, until 1930,” I

hope to use the experience of Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans in Cape Town to capture the difficulties faced by black westerners when confronted with Africa. I want to illuminate that aspect of black western identities—so apparent in my early assumptions about Africa—that causes one to only understand and appreciate Africa within a western context.

This thesis is the continuation of work I began through UCT's Centre for African Studies honor's program in 2002. My honor's thesis, *"Passing for Coloured: Black Americans, Pan-Africanism, and Cape Town, 1880-1930"*, was a somewhat cursory examination of nineteenth century notions of civilization and progress as displayed by early pan-Africanists and specifically by African-Americans in Cape Town. This research was fueled largely by my surprising 'discovery' that the descendants of African-Americans were all Coloured South Africans.<sup>1</sup> Embarrassingly, my understanding of Coloured identity at the time was that it was solely hinged upon considering oneself 'racially mixed'<sup>2</sup> and, therefore, superior to black South Africans. I was also aware that Coloured identity brought with it a legal superiority to black South Africans, and that the title designated those fair-skinned black South Africans in the Western Cape Province who in 1994 largely supported the Afrikaner Nationalist Party.<sup>3</sup> With this

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa, Coloured is the name first imposed upon and later largely appropriated by those people, commonly of mixed racial heritage, who are the descendants of European settlers, Southeast Asian slaves, free and enslaved Africans from the eastern and western coasts, and indigenous Khoisan. During apartheid, Coloured referred to anyone who could not be neatly packaged as European, Bantu-speaking African, or Indian. As such, the use of Coloured in the South African context is different from the use of Colored in North America, which was used to identify anyone with any African ancestry. In this thesis, I use capital letters in spelling Coloured, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, as I am referring to specific 'groups' of people. I use 'black' to refer to these 'groups' collectively.

<sup>2</sup> This is problematic for me because such a preoccupation with being 'racially mixed' not only incorrectly presupposes the existence of 'pure races,' but also forces those who subscribe to such an identity to understand themselves only in relation to something they are not.

<sup>3</sup> When I first arrived in Cape Town, my understanding of Coloured identity was essentially negative. I was—and still am—in total disagreement with what seemed to be a preoccupation with being 'mixed' and a tendency to only recognize European ancestry. For instance, I was appalled by Richard van der Ross' discussion of John Tobin's origins in his notes on the African People's Organization and Dr. Abdurahman. "John James George Tobin," van der Ross writes, "was the son of an Irishman who settled in Port Elizabeth and later moved to Kimberley, taking his family with him... He was a man of strong conviction—note his Irish heritage!—and was not easily detracted from a path once he had chosen it." From this, I learned that J. Tobin apparently sprang from the head of an Irishman who alone was responsible for Tobin's strong conviction! I was startled by how eager van der Ross and other Coloured South Africans were to assert the European heritage of Coloured people almost always to the detriment of their African and Asian ancestry. On numerous occasions, Coloured South Africans, without my even asking, voluntarily shared their knowledge about their "grandfather who was a Swede," and their "great-grandfather who was a Dutch." I even had a discussion with a Coloured lawyer from Johannesburg who insisted that while she may have Khoisan ancestry, the Khoisan were not African! See R.E. van der Ross, "The Founding of the African Peoples Organization in Cape Town in 1903 and the Role of Dr. Abdurahman," *Munger Africana Library Notes* no. 28 (February 1975), 15.

understanding, my initial reaction to Coloured identity was essentially negative. One may be able to imagine, then, my shock as a young black American woman after being told that the Coloured community absorbed early black American immigrants to Cape Town. Informed as I was by the Black Power Movement in the U.S. that made even the most unconscious black American “black and proud,” the afrocentrism that produced Kwanzaa, and the pan-Africanism that made Africa the “fatherland” and then the “motherland,” this was outrageous. What was going on here? What kind of black people were Coloureds, and what was wrong with those African-Americans who joined forces with them?

In trying to answer these questions, it quickly became clear to me that I was approaching the topic in all of the wrong ways. First, coloured identity is far more complex than racial mixture and is not always a good indicator of pro-Nationalist sentiment. Secondly, it was exceedingly difficult to pinpoint African-Americans in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The only leads I had pointed to Afro-Caribbeans. Not only were most black English-speaking immigrants to the Cape black West Indians, but almost all of them were referred to as “American Negroes.” African-Americans were, in fact, the needle in the proverbial haystack. By the end of the year, discouragement had set in, and I began considering other topics for the master’s research I was to begin the following year. I hastily settled upon an examination of African-American immigrants to Ghana in hopes that, there, I could find a more identifiable black American community.

My fascination with black Americans who identified with Coloured people in Cape Town had not abated, though. I needed to know more about them. It soon hit me that if I chose to continue this research, I would need to broaden my scope—looking at the entire ‘American Negro’ community as it was known in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I would need to include black West Indians in my research. In doing this, I would paint a more accurate picture of the ‘American Negro’ community in Cape Town, while avoiding having to positively identify a handful of supposed black Americans. I would also avoid potentially confusing readers by discussing Afro-Caribbeans—who were often referred to as ‘American Negroes’—in a thesis nominally about African-Americans. Furthermore, as suggested by Dr. Maanda Mulaudzi, black West Indians and Americans are actually both ‘American Negroes,’ in the sense that they were ‘Negroes’ from the ‘Americas.’ To portray an ‘American Negro’ community whose members were not all from the U.S. would not be as incorrect as I thought.

Thirdly, in writing 'Passing for Coloured,' I found myself desperately searching for some explanation as to why these African-Americans 'passed' for Coloured. By using the term 'passing,' I consciously alluded to those fair-skinned black Americans who 'passed' for white and was suggesting that the African-American identity was so different from that of Coloured South Africans, that African-Americans masquerading as Coloured or solely operating within Coloured circles were somehow living a lie. For some reason, I felt a personal obligation to African-Americans to explain away what I thought was obviously a mistake on the part of African-Americans in Cape Town who only associated with Coloured South Africa. In the introduction to my honor's thesis, I asserted that African-Americans in Cape Town "encouraged the alienation of black South African cultures, religions, and ways of life," in the Cape through their union with, "the largely western-aspiring Coloured elite, which excluded a large majority of black Africans." Such "early pan-African encounters, initiated by Black Americans," I continued, "often involved Black Americans dutifully guarding the gates of western civilization, letting in only those who aspired to European notions of civility. In this way," I argued, "Black Americans were only slightly better than European colonialists." This, I argued, was unacceptable for the descendants of African slaves in Africa. African-Americans, I believed, were mistaken in degrading African cultures and associating only with those groups in Africa that accepted nineteenth century European notions of civilization and progress. I incorporated a discussion about Liberia and its black Americo-Liberians as an example of this. I even introduced a contemporary legacy of this unfortunate mistake by speaking about the pompous attitudes of some African-American professionals in South Africa who claim to be contributing to Africa's uplift while rarely associating with any black South Africans. I thought that the mistake could be resolved if ever African-Americans were able to see the hypocrisy in their actions in Africa.

It was not, however, until I began working on my master's thesis, that I realized that African-American behavior in Africa was not so much a mistake that could be easily corrected or a stubborn case of conceit as it was the only way in which many African-Americans knew how to conduct themselves in Africa. This had more to do with how African-Americans view themselves in relation to Africa than it does with a dogged determination to disrespect the continent and its peoples or a careless mistake. My excitement as a child over an African country that seemed to be, like me, 'uncharacteristically' western, spoke more to how I related to

Africa as a black westerner descended from Africa than it did with high-minded condescension. Though it required me to swallow my pride, I was finally able to see that the ‘American Negro’ community in Cape Town identified with Coloureds because both groups were part and parcel of the same western paradigm and in this way, shared a similar view of themselves as black westerners in relation to Africa. Though there are myriad differences between the African-American and Coloured identities and the ways in which they were constructed and are attached to Africa, our differences often cloud our most fundamental similarity. Like Coloured South Africans, African-Americans had an intimate, though disjointed and troubled, connection with both the West and with Africa.

The small ‘American Negro’ community in Cape Town was comprised largely of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. The title of this thesis, “‘Soort Soek Soort’: The ‘American Negro’ Community in Cape Town, until 1930” was taken from an interview with the South African son of a black American immigrant from Richmond, Virginia, in the U.S. In describing the Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans that settled in Cape Town he used the Afrikaans phrase, “soort soek soort,” which is to say that like seeks like. In English, “birds of a feather flock together.” Black Americans and West Indians united because they were similar in many ways. Having in common their African heritage, the legacy of slavery, the history as blacks in the Americas, and westernization, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans united in Cape Town because, in the South African context, their similarities outweighed their differences.

Because the “American Negro” community in Cape Town encompassed African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and even some like-minded others, it offers a telling insight into identity within the African Diaspora and among westernized blacks and the dilemma posed them by return to the African ‘homeland.’ Cape Town’s ‘American Negroes’ are particularly worth looking at because they also enjoyed a close relationship with and were influential in the emergent and westernized Coloured elite, which premised its identity on a distinction between itself and local Europeans and Africans.

In writing this thesis, I want to suggest that the coalescence of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans— major groups within the unique and syncretic cultural sphere that Paul Gilroy calls the “Black Atlantic”<sup>4</sup>— is important in understanding the similarities underlying “Black

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Atlantic” cultures, and that in Cape Town these commonalities found their greatest expression in the creation of a disparate ‘American Negro’ community that operated in tandem with the emergent Coloured identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Best described under the rubric of blacks in western modernity,<sup>5</sup> the affinity between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town is underlined by their common desire to reconcile with and insert themselves into a western world that is both home and place of exile. The unification of ‘American Negroes’ and Coloureds- particularly Coloured elites- who were embarking on their own western modernity project further illuminates this point and raises interesting questions about Coloured identity, and its relationship to African-American and Afro-Caribbean identities and the “Black Atlantic.” To this end, I have tried to expand upon Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic” while fusing existing and new information on the black West Indians and black Americans living in the city during this period into a discussion that details why they settled in the city, what they did here, how they came to unite as ‘American Negroes,’ and the ease with which they bonded with the emerging Coloured community.

My research for this thesis has been a little less systematic than I had desired, but productive nonetheless. While completing my honor’s research in 2002, I consulted with Dr. Maanda Mulaudzi who helped me to conceptualize what was, then, still a research interest and made a number of important suggestions for beginning a review of the pertinent literature, namely James Campbell’s all-important *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa*. I also contacted the United States consulate in Cape Town in hopes of finding a record of the African-Americans living in the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, there were no such records in the Cape Town office. I was told, however, that it would be a good idea to track down the Gow family, which was known to have had black American roots. This suggestion was to prove immensely helpful.

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<sup>5</sup> I understand modernity to be a conscious placing of oneself within history with the intention of building upon one’s own past or traditions in order to produce a different and, what is thought to be a better, future. Though a legacy of the Enlightenment in Europe, modernity is a universal process that includes a reliance on scientific knowledge and reason, and advancements in technology, social organization, political institutions, etc. Modernity is not equal to westernization, though I understand westernization to be the modernizing experience of the occident and its satellites. I have arrived at this definition of modernity through personal conversations with Dr. Kwesi Kwaa Prah, through the reading of Ntongela Masilela’s “New Negroism and New Africanism: The Influence of United States Modernity on the Construction of South African Modernity,” *Renaissance Noir* 2, no.2: 47-59; and Roger Scruton’s entry on modernity, *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, (London: Pan Books, 1983), 302-303.

I later came across a website about Howard University Professor Robert R. Edgar's ongoing research into the connection between African-Americans and black South Africa. As I had scant knowledge of the early presence of black Americans and black West Indians in South Africa, I did not hesitate to contact him in hopes that he might be able to provide some guidance. I was not disappointed. Before completing my honor's thesis, I met with Dr. Edgar at the University of Cape Town where he commented on my master's thesis topic and pointed me toward relevant books and articles. The next time I met with Dr. Edgar in the winter of 2002, he provided me with contact details for Frances Hermine "Tshepo" Williams, formerly Gow, who is the granddaughter of an Afro-Caribbean immigrant to Cape Town and the daughter of the first African bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church and former pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Cape Town. In January 2003, before I returned to Cape Town, I interviewed Mrs. Williams in Richmond, Virginia. The information she provided convinced me that there was much more to be found in Cape Town. She also provided me with my own copy of Campbell's *Songs of Zion*.

When I returned to Cape Town at the end of January 2003, I still had little knowledge of South African history, save for what I had learned from periodic perusals through the *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*<sup>6</sup> so with only my honors research to guide me and only a year remaining in Cape Town, I felt I had no choice but to just dig in. I decided to find the descendants of black West Indians and Americans so that I might hear first-hand what the 'American Negro' community was like. I had long been interested in oral history and felt that it was important for history to preserve the thoughts and beliefs of its subjects. My honor's research and a good deal of the research that I conducted as an undergraduate included interviews. During my honor's year, I took a course in oral history with Dr. Sean Field of UCT's Centre for Popular Memory in order to improve my interviewing skills. In February 2003, I solicited the help of the *Cape Argus* in helping me to find the descendants of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town. The *Argus* agreed to run a story on my research alongside a photo of the West Indian and American Association, which I found at the District Six Museum. The article "Retracing the Steps of District Six's U.S. Settlers" gave my contact details and asked readers to phone me if they had any information on any of the men in the photo or any

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<sup>6</sup> *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, third edition, (Cape Town: Reader's Digest Association Limited, 1994).

other black American or black West Indian immigrants.<sup>7</sup> The response was overwhelming, and I eventually interviewed over a dozen people, many of who were children or grandchildren of Afro-Caribbeans and African-American immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, I contacted Bethel A.M.E. Church, the first A.M.E. church in Cape Town and center of the 'American Negro'. Bethel A.M.E. was bulldozed along with most other buildings in the largely Coloured sixth district of Cape Town at the behest of the apartheid government, but had been reestablished in Hazendal, Athlone on the Cape Flats. Rev. Andrew Lewin, pastor of Bethel, was very helpful in picking me up at my home in Rondebosch and transporting me to Bethel where I began reading old marriage registers, board meeting notes, and other documents rescued before the state demolished the church building. I spent several weeks reading through these records.

While conducting interviews and gathering information from the Bethel A.M.E. records, I also began to survey the secondary literature on the A.M.E. Church, Afro-Caribbean and African-American migration, Cape Town, and the history of Coloured Cape Town. Work by Gad J. Heuman, Bonham C. Richardson, David Watts, Patrick Bryan, Hilary Beckles, and J.H. Parry and P.M. Sherlock was helpful in giving me a sense of living conditions in the Caribbean during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the circumstances which drove Afro-Caribbeans to search for work away from home.<sup>9</sup> Herbert Aptheker's collection of primary documents on African-American history from Reconstruction to 1910, Mary Ellison's history of black Americans since 1865, and Philip S. Foner's series on the history of black Americans

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<sup>7</sup> Sipokazi Maposa, "Retracing the Steps of District Six's U.S. Settlers," *Cape Argus*, 27 February 2003.

<sup>8</sup> The interviews I have used in this thesis are listed in the bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1981); Bonham C Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992: A Regional Geography*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1991); Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies* (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1966); Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States: From the Reconstruction Years to the Founding of the N.A.A.C.P. in 1910* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1968); Mary Ellison, *The Black Experience: American Blacks Since 1865* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1974); Philip S Foner, *History of Black Americans: From Africa to the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975); *ibid.*, *History of Black Americans: From the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom to the Eve of the Compromise of 1850* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983); *ibid.*, *History of Black Americans: From the Compromise of 1850 to the End of the Civil War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983).



provided details about why African-Americans migrated from the southern states after the Civil War and why an increasing, but small, number began to see Africa as a refuge from American oppression and as the ideal location for black redemption. The second chapter of this thesis, Diasporization, uses these and other works to discuss the migration of the African Diaspora to more favorable locations in the Americas and why a handful of these individuals made their way to Africa and Cape Town. Such historical background is critical to an understanding of how African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans related to each other, to Africa, and to Coloureds in Cape Town. This discussion is shored up by brief accounts of black Americans and black West Indians who migrated and eventually settled in Cape Town.

The third chapter is an in-depth discussion of why African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans either immigrated or temporarily settled in Cape Town, how they came to be known as ‘American Negroes’, and what they did in Cape Town. I argue that Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans in the city were united first by the local Capetonian perception that relatively dark-skinned foreigners who spoke English as a first language and appeared to move with ease and comfort through western society were ‘American Negroes,’ and then by their similarities as blacks from the Americas. I also look at the organizations and institutions that provided cohesion and structure to the ‘American Negro’ community. James Campbell’s work on the A.M.E. church was important in discovering those aspects of the A.M.E. church, which made it disposed to becoming the center of the ‘American Negro’ community in Cape Town.<sup>10</sup> Necessarily, Alan Copley’s, “‘Far From Home’: The Origins and Significance of the Afro-Caribbean Community in South Africa to 1930,” which thoroughly outlines the origin and nature of the black West Indian community in South Africa provided an important springboard from which to launch this chapter.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Copley’s work, however, I focus on Cape Town while covering both black Americans and black West Indians, who I consider to have collectively been a sub-community of their own called ‘American Negroes’. I have taken care to locate this community specifically within Cape Town society by discussing ‘American Negro’ motivations for remaining in the city and the ways in which they interacted with the city and its people. By doing this, my work

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<sup>10</sup> James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Alan Gregor Copley, “‘Far From Home’: The Origins and Significance of the Afro-Caribbean Community in South Africa to 1930,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 1992): 349-370.

builds upon that of Copley, Clement T. Keto, and E. De Waal who have made important contributions to our knowledge about African-Americans and black West Indians in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth chapter, *Coloured Identity, Black Westerners, and Modernity*, discusses the way in which African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were absorbed into and exercised great influence within Cape Town's new Coloured elite. This chapter will analyze Campbell's finding that the A.M.E. church in Cape Town, the center of the 'American Negro' community, "became the province of an emerging Coloured elite that wore its affiliation with black America as a badge of distinction," and, "found in the church a means to distance themselves from the city's African working class."<sup>13</sup> The chapter probes why, as Copley notes, Afro-Caribbeans—and, also African-Americans—almost exclusively married Coloured women, and why, as immigrants and visitors, 'American Negroes' became upstanding members of the Coloured community. Using Gilroy's concept of the "Black Atlantic"<sup>14</sup> as a backdrop, the chapter asserts that the primary point of intersection between Coloureds— particularly the Coloured elite— and 'American Negroes' in Cape Town was their existence in that gray space sandwiched between Africa and what they understood to be a superior Western and racially white world to which they had contributed, but from which they were estranged. As blacks living in and helping to build the western world, but not fully integrated into that world, they strove to prove their capacity for full recognition and shared an understanding that modernity could be equated with westernization and disassociation from Africa. Thus, to varying degrees and for different reasons, these syncretic groups sought to jettison those cultural items which most linked them to an 'inferior' Africa while retaining those that emphasized their propensity for induction into the western world.

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<sup>12</sup> Clement T. Keto, "Black Americans and South Africa, 1890-1910," *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs* 5, no. 4 (July 1972): 383-406; E. De Waal, "American Black Residents and Visitors in the S. A. R. Before 1899," *South African Historical Journal* 6 (1974): 52-55.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 141.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

## Diasporization

The end of slavery in the British West Indies and later in the United States set into motion a redistribution of the transatlantic African Diaspora that later led a small number of blacks to Cape Town. In the U.S., the failure of post-Civil war reconstruction to integrate emancipated slaves into society as free and equal citizens, and vicious anti-black violence forced thousands of blacks to leave their homes in the southern states in search of jobs, education and better living conditions in the western and northern states. Often unable to find reprieve from racism and violence, a handful of African-Americans became quite vocal in their advocacy of a black exodus from the country. Led primarily by a small faction of Christian religious leaders and intellectuals, the emigration movement in the U.S. was largely responsible for the small group of African-Americans living in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Caribbean, a drop in the sugar price, worsening labor conditions, and natural and financial disasters forced thousands of freed Afro-Caribbeans to migrate to other islands and to the South and Central American mainlands in search of work, education, and better opportunities. As British colonial subjects, a number of Afro-Caribbeans found employment with the British home trade as seamen and traveled throughout the Empire. Though it was rarely their intention, upon leaving the Caribbean, to emigrate permanently, a number of Afro-Caribbean seamen never returned home. Not surprisingly, most of Cape Town's black West Indian population arrived as sailors onboard British ships.

### Afro-Caribbean Migration

Slavery was abolished in the British colonies in 1838 after a four-year period of apprenticeship. In the islands of the British West Indies, the elite planter class remained powerful after emancipation and in an effort to curtail the effects of abolition on the workforce, sought to confine the newly freed blacks to the plantations at menial wages.<sup>15</sup> In a sense, the planters wanted to enslave blacks in their freedom. For several of the islands with high population density and thus little available land for new settlement, it was not difficult for

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<sup>15</sup> Richardson. *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992*, 133, 135.

planters to do just this because slaves on these islands had few options for relocation. Barbados and Antigua had the highest population densities in the British West Indies and saw little change in their societies immediately after emancipation. Indeed, the population densities of the various islands are decent indicators of the amount of tension that would later arise between blacks and planters. St. Kitts, Grenada, Montserrat, Nevis, and St. Vincent had medium population densities while Jamaica, Tobago, Dominica, St. Lucia, and Trinidad had relatively low densities.<sup>16</sup> Generally, those islands with high and medium population densities later became the major contributors of migrant laborers to those islands with low density and to lands further abroad. Initially, the planters on these islands were not fearful of losing their workers and were comfortable knowing that they could pay their laborers the lowest of wages. Antigua was so sure that its workforce was not in jeopardy that it bypassed the period of apprenticeship and freed its slaves outright in 1834. J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock assert that Barbados and St. Kitts might also have omitted the period of apprenticeship without fear of a shrinking workforce.<sup>17</sup>

The greatest tension between former black slaves and planters arose on those islands where land was plentiful and estates were so powerful that they sought to restrict black access to the land. During the apprenticeship period on these islands, planters continued many of the practices that had accompanied slavery leaving the quasi-free slaves with little evidence that they had been emancipated. The slaves on these islands, however, often had a long tradition of independence, and after apprenticeship largely made up the balance of the migrant workers who left the plantations in droves in search of finding work on their own. Influenced by a long tradition of independent black peasantry that predated emancipation, many of the freed blacks in British Guiana, and to a lesser degree Trinidad, refused to work on plantations. Like black slaves in Jamaica, many slaves in British Guiana and Trinidad ran away from the plantations and established settlements in the interior where they farmed for subsistence. After emancipation, these independent Black settlements, especially in British Guiana and Jamaica, swelled and their numbers multiplied. The mere existence of such independent black settlements encouraged blacks to either farm for themselves or to reject plantation labor in favor of other forms of employment. This exasperated the tension between the former slaves who wanted to maintain

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<sup>16</sup> Watts, *The West Indies*, 472; Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 93-95.

<sup>17</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 191, 194.

their tradition of independence and the powerful planters who wanted to confine blacks to the plantations.<sup>18</sup> With the exodus of labor, planters in post-emancipation British Guiana and Trinidad had no choice but to encourage an influx of workers from neighboring islands.

After the expiration of the period of apprenticeship, none of the islands were unaffected by the planters' aggression in seeking to maintain cheap labor under poor working conditions. After 1838, blacks were free to move and sell their labor as they wished and they did so by the thousands. Planters in British Guiana and Trinidad, eager to replace labor forces that preferred to work independently for themselves, offered better wages than those of many of the neighboring islands in order to lure workers. By 1842 the densely populated island of Barbados had experienced a mass exodus of workers who found better pay in Trinidad and British Guiana. Colonial officials estimated the loss to Barbados as 4000 workers. These Barbadian workers were joined in Trinidad by hundreds and in British Guiana by 8000 men and women from St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada, and the Grenadines.<sup>19</sup>

The barrage of natural disasters, epidemics, and financial catastrophes that rocked the Caribbean in the 19th century further diminished labor conditions for blacks in the West Indies and exacerbated the need for many West Indians to travel throughout the Caribbean in search of work. The transition from slave labor to wage labor caused economic crises in the 1840s.<sup>20</sup> Outbreaks of smallpox, typhoid, measles, yellow fever, cholera, diphtheria, endemic malaria, and influenza were frequent in 19<sup>th</sup> century British West Indies.<sup>21</sup> The 1850s were marked by natural disasters and the 1860s by civil unrest.<sup>22</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s there was a severe economic depression in the sugar-producing colonies as the price of sugar dropped with the demand. Wages and working conditions followed suit.<sup>23</sup> It became clear that the islands could not support

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<sup>18</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 194-196.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992: A Regional Geography*, 135-136; Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 112-113.

<sup>20</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 197.

<sup>21</sup> Watts, *The West Indies*, 465.

<sup>22</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World*, 137.

its people under such circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Laborers and professionals, alike left home in search of better opportunities.

While most black West Indian migrants remained within the arc of the Caribbean islands, it became necessary for others to venture out further. One group of 270 men from Barbados, Martinique, and Guadeloupe never returned home after boarding a ship bound to the Congo where they labored on King Leopold's railroad. West Indians migrated to Costa Rica, Honduras, Limón, Cristóbal, and Cuba in search of work. Many settled and established small West Indian communities on the coast of Central America. A number of Afro-Caribbean men became sailors. Sailors from Barbados and Grenadines were harpooners on whalers in the Pacific.<sup>25</sup> Alan Copley notes that the opportunity to see the world and a seaman's wages were sufficient enticement for young men to take up lives on the sea. These men were partially responsible for the small West Indian communities that, as Copley notes, sprang up in all of the major Atlantic ports, and largely responsible for the small Afro-Caribbean community in Cape Town.<sup>26</sup>

Between 1850 and 1855, as many as 5 000 Jamaicans journeyed to Panama to provide unskilled labor in the building of a railway that was to be a circuitous route along the transcontinental railroad that linked the eastern U.S. to California by 1869.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the construction of the Panama rail line and the link it provided between the West Indies and California provides a partial explanation for the bizarre story of how Francis McDonald Gow, son of a couple from St. Kitts, was born in San Francisco in 1857.<sup>28</sup> F. M. Gow's granddaughter recalls being told that her grandfather and his parents were on a ship bound for the West Indies from San Francisco when his parents were both stricken with illness and died. A Scotsman on

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<sup>24</sup> Watts, *The West Indies*, 482.

<sup>25</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 244; Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Copley, "'Far From Home,'" 352.

<sup>27</sup> Richardson. *The Caribbean in the Wider World*, 136-137.

<sup>28</sup> F. M. Gow's death notice states that he was born in San Francisco, U.S.A. While most historians agree that F. M. Gow was born in either the U.S. or the West Indies, and not South Africa, his exact origin is elusive. His family believes that he was from St. Kitts and claims that one family member has found proof of this in London. Personal contact with this family member, however, has not yielded any evidence to support this claim. "Not much is known," about Gow's origins, he writes, "and any information is based on speculation." Oliver Kleinsmidt, personal correspondence with the author, 30 October 2003; Frances Hermine Williams, personal interview by author, Richmond, U.S.A, 9 January 2003; Donald Kleinsmidt, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.

the ship took charge of the young Gow and raised him in Scotland. Upon coming of age, Gow realized that “there were no Blacks” in Scotland, so he boarded a ship bound for Cape Town.<sup>29</sup> While it is generally agreed that Jamaican and Chinese workers provided the bulk of the labor performed on the Panama railroad, it is likely that many of the “Jamaican” laborers were, in fact, from other Caribbean islands. Copley writes of a West Indian seaman from Prince Edward Island who was mistaken for a Barbadian because Barbados was a major hub for West Indians looking to join ship crews on the Atlantic route.<sup>30</sup> It is probable, therefore, that other West Indian islands were represented in the work crews that constructed the Panama railroad and possible that F. M. Gow’s family might have made their way north along the railroad.

Post-emancipation migration was not, however, confined to laborers from the British West Indies. Not only did a handful of West Indians from non-British islands settle in Cape Town, but a number of aspiring professionals from British colonies and other European colonies in the Caribbean contributed to the wave of immigration and even provided an intellectual framework for the movement.<sup>31</sup> St. Thomas-born<sup>32</sup> Edward Blyden, made eight visits, each of several months, to the U.S. His first visit in 1850 was made with the intention of studying for the ministry, but finding that there were no opportunities, available, he left for the newly independent Republic of Liberia, of which he became a citizen in 1851. During his subsequent trips to the U.S., Blyden lectured to Black American audiences on self-pride and their African heritage and advocated the emigration of a select group of dedicated and skilled Black Americans to Liberia. Like intellectuals of his time, he viewed the “repatriation” of Black Americans as necessary for the redemption of Africa and the Black race. In Washington D.C., in 1890, Blyden argued that it was no coincidence that “Africa was completely shut up until the time arrived for emancipation of her children in the Western World.” It was an act of providence, he argued, that so synchronized European colonization of Africa and the abolition of slavery in the U.S. He predicted that the world would soon, “understand the purpose of the

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<sup>29</sup> Frances Hermine Williams, personal interview by author, Richmond, U.S.A., 9 January 2003.

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 28, Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 355.

<sup>31</sup> Because of space and time constraints, I will focus primarily on the British Caribbean.

<sup>32</sup> St. Thomas was a Danish colony that was later purchased by the United States along with other islands that became the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Almighty in having permitted the exile and bondage of the Africans and they will see that for Africa's redemption the Negro is the chosen instrument."<sup>33</sup>

In this belief, Blyden was not alone. A number of black intellectuals in the U.S. and the West Indies believed that African enslavement in the West, though unjust and evil, was divinely sanctioned and necessary for the rejuvenation of Africa. These early pan-African intellectuals tended to agree with the 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of civilization, which posited that all people were on the same trajectory of progress, but at different points. They argued that black emigration from the west would serve as the potent injection of civilizing matter that was necessary for Africa to speed up or begin its movement along this path, allowing it to catch up with Europe. Blyden's thoughts and writings proved to be influential in the perceptions West Indians and Black Americans had of Africa, and the roles they were destined to play in the continent.

Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams, the son of a Trinidadian woman and an immigrant from Barbados, was born in Trinidad in 1869.<sup>34</sup> At the age of 28, he left Trinidad for Britain where he enrolled in Grays Inn London. Three years later, Williams convened the first Pan-African Conference, which attracted about thirty delegates from Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States.<sup>35</sup> One of the delegates to the conference was Dominica-born George James Christian who was the son of an Antiguan solicitor who practiced in Dominica. Christian enrolled in Gray's Inn two years after Williams and upon finishing his studies, established a successful private practice as a "concessions" lawyer in Sekondi, Ghana. Christian remained in Ghana for the rest of his life where he married several wives according to local custom, had a number of children, and built an extravagant home called Dominica House, designed by a Black American man named Chapelle.<sup>36</sup> Henry Sylvester Williams later spent a year in Cape Town where he became the first black advocate to practice at the Cape bar.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Black Spokesperson: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*. Edited by Hollis R. Lynch, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1971, 47-48.

<sup>34</sup> J. R. Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams: Imperial Pan-Africanist*. London: Rex Collings, 1975, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Margaret D. Rouse-Jones of the University of The West Indies, St. Augustine for allowing me to cite her intriguing work on the life of George James Christian, which is part of a larger work-in-progress. Margaret D. Rouse-Jones, "George James Christian of Dominica and the Gold Coast." Paper presented at Conference on Henry Sylvestre-Williams and Pan-Africanism: A Retrospection and Projection, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine and Oberlin College, 4-13 January 2001: 23pp. The Chapelle who designed 'Sekondi



A number of West Indians, like Blyden, left the Caribbean for the U.S. With the establishment of regular steamship service between Jamaica and New York City in 1879, many West Indians journeyed to the growing industrial centers of the United States.<sup>38</sup> Amos Absalom, of Port Maria, along with several of his younger brothers were among the Jamaicans who left the Caribbean for American cities. The Absalom brothers were the sons of a wealthy Jewish man and an Afro-Caribbean woman. At their father's insistence that they be educated, the Absalom brothers traveled to New York City where two of them eventually became lawyers, one a graduate of Howard University and a dentist in Harlem, and another made a small fortune in bookbinding. Amos Absalom later joined the crew of a U.S. ship, which carried him to Cape Town.<sup>39</sup>

Amos Absalom, F.M. Gow, and Henry Sylvester Williams were joined in Cape Town by a number of others from the Caribbean. It should not be surprising that the majority of West Indians who settled in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were from British Guiana and Jamaica, which had long traditions of black independence and enterprise, and Barbados which had the highest population density in the British West Indies.

West Indian migration, however, was not without outside stimulus. The West Indian Regiment served in the South African War and it is possible that some of these men were Afro-Caribbeans.<sup>40</sup> A few Afro-Caribbeans were known to have served with the British as noncombatants.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that some of these black West Indians made their way to Cape Town after the war.

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House' may have been African-American Charles Chapelle who established the African Union Company in 1912, a transnational company that dealt in mahogany, ginger and cocoa and was headquartered in Sekondi. See Robert Trent Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans: Garveyism in Segregationist South Africa, 1920-1940," Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Saunders, "From Trinidad to Cape Town: The First Black Lawyer at the Cape," *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 55, no.4 (June 2001): 146.

<sup>38</sup> Watts, *The West Indies*, 483; Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 245.

<sup>39</sup> Agnes Absalom, personal interview by author, Landsdowne, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Many thanks to Ben Bousquet who brought this to my attention and also suggested that Afro-Caribbeans may have been actively recruited in the West Indies to work in Cape Town's docks.

<sup>41</sup> Copley, "'Far From Home,'" 350.

## African-American Migration

Slavery was abolished in the United States a quarter of a century after the apprenticeship period ended in British colonies. By 1865, the country was emerging from its civil war, piecing together its fragmented nationhood and confronting the issue of millions of newly freed blacks. Reconstruction efforts, reminiscent of the actions of the planters in post-emancipation British Caribbean colonies, were geared primarily towards restoring the Union while granting freed blacks cursory tokens of freedom without further alienating southern whites. Post-war policymaking did little to initiate the development of a free and equal society. Mary Ellison notes that the only tangible outcomes of Reconstruction were the ratification of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which did little more than grant Black Americans the basic accoutrements of citizenship, without guaranteeing the integrity of these new rights. As former slave and editor of the *New York Age* wrote of reconstruction policy, “it made slaves freemen and freemen slaves in the same breath by conferring the franchise and withholding the guarantees to insure its exercise.”<sup>42</sup>

The southern states were given the space to devise their own reconstruction plans, allowing for the development of state ‘Black Codes,’ which smacked of slavery, but were touted as temporary policies regarding freed blacks. Like Caribbean planters, southern whites were interested in perpetuating the slave labor system under the guise of freedom. Though a number of experiments conducted to test the capacity of blacks to farm independently had proved that they were industrious and more than capable of making profits, proposals for widespread land grants to freed blacks were unsuccessful. Without access to land and disillusioned by lackluster freedom, most freed blacks in the U.S. had no choice but to remain on the plantations earning meager wages or a small portion of the crops they planted.<sup>43</sup> While some Black Americans left the plantations and moved from the rural areas to southern towns, to the northern states or to the towns that were beginning to dot the west, most remained confined to southern land.

By the 1870s, reconstruction efforts to integrate Black Americans into American society were unraveling as the South regained control of much of its affairs and the federal government

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<sup>42</sup> Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 670.

<sup>43</sup> Ellison, *The Black Experience*, 5-9.

encouraged racial segregation through a series of conservative legal judgements. By 1883, the Supreme Court had ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional and by 1896 it had upheld the practice of providing “separate, but equal” transportation for blacks and whites. By the 1880s the much-feared Ku Klux Klan had begun its terror campaign to dissuade Blacks from exercising their Constitutional rights, inaugurating a long wave of anti-black violence. Trees across the nation, and particularly in the south, were soon heavy with what Billie Holliday would later call the “strange fruit” of lynched black men. Segregation and racism in the United States had reemerged stronger than ever and many Blacks in the South, sought refuge by packing up and leaving.

Migration has featured throughout the history of Blacks in America; its antecedent being found in the runaway slaves who fled the South for freedom in the northern states. A number of those who fled to the North, made their way to Canada exercising another Black American migratory option – escape from the U.S. altogether. Throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, emigration from the United States was one of the central and most controversial issues in the country. One of the earliest proponents of Black American emigration was wealthy black New England businessman and seaman Paul Cuffee. In 1811, he sailed to the British colony of Sierra Leone, which was founded in 1787 for freed Black slaves from England and the West Indies. Cuffee was interested in scouting out the land in hopes that Black American families might be able to settle in the colony and assist its various peoples by helping to develop an economy based on African products and resources.<sup>44</sup> Cuffee is said by the editor of his journal Sheldon H. Harris to have advocated all Black Americans emigrating from the United States.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to Sierra Leone, African-American emigrationists considered emigration to Central America, Haiti, and Trinidad. Richard Allen, one of the founders of the first independent Black denomination in the U.S., the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church, headed the “Haytien Emigration Society” in 1824, which helped 2 000 Black Americans emigrate to Haiti at the invitation of Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer.<sup>46</sup> Africa, though, figured most prominently

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<sup>44</sup>Foner, *History of Black Americans: From Africa to the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom*, 582.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 582-583.

<sup>46</sup> Most of these emigrants returned to the U.S. because life was too difficult for them on the island. Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 71.

in Black American emigration schemes. Black Americans had a particular attachment to what many called the “Fatherland.” Hollis R. Lynch notes that, significantly, almost all of the Black organizations in the United States, up to about the third decade of the nineteenth century, had names which included the word “African.”<sup>47</sup> Foner contends that “all separate [Black] institutions adopted” the word “African” in their titles out of deference for Black America’s ancestral home. In 1845 Black American Reuben Simpson penned a letter to William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* explaining the Black American affinity for Africa. “It is true,” he wrote, “we are not Africans, or natives born upon the soil of Africa; yet, as the descendants of that race, how can we better manifest that respect due to our fathers who begat us, than by the adoption of the term in our institutions, and inscribing it upon our public places of resort?”<sup>48</sup> Though the vast majority of Black Americans had never been to Africa, the continent was a reference point for them, a place of origin for which many felt a strong attachment. For many, Africa was the most logical destination for emigrating Black Americans.

Like Edward Wilmot Blyden, though, Black American emigrationists were convinced that it was their Christian calling to civilize Africa. Black American Alexander Crummel who joined Blyden in Liberia in 1853 believed that while Africa was the cradle of civilization, its progress had somehow become arrested. Only its westernized children could reinvigorate the continent, he argued. Like Blyden, Black American emigrationists believed that slavery was the will of God and the crucible through which Black Americans had to pass in order to be fit to redeem the continent of their uncivilized ancestors. In disagreement with this civilizationist stance, T. Thomas Fortune spouted, “the talk about the black people being brought to this country to prepare themselves to evangelize Africa is so much religious nonsense boiled down to sycophantic platitude. The Lord, who is eminently just, had no hand in their forcible coming here; it was preeminently the work of the devil.”<sup>49</sup> His outrage fell upon deaf ears. Black American emigrationists had what Kwame Anthony Appiah called, “an essentially negative sense of traditional culture in Africa as anarchic, unprincipled, ignorant, defined by the absence

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<sup>47</sup> Hollis R. Lynch, “Pan-Negro Nationalism in the New World, Before 1862,” in *The Making of Black America: Essays in Negro Life and History*, edited by August Meier and Elliott Rudwick (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 44.

<sup>48</sup> Foner, *History of Black Americans: From Africa to the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom*, 555-556.

<sup>49</sup> Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 670-671.

of all positive traits of civilisation as ‘savage.’”<sup>50</sup> Black American emigrationists, therefore, felt superior to the people from which they admittedly sprang, the people of their Fatherland. This attitude would have a major influence on the West Indian and Black American community in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Not surprisingly, this philosophy seems to have been most pronounced among the Black Americans in Cape Town, some of whom were Christian missionaries.

In 1817, the controversial American Colonization Society (ACS) joined Black emigrationists in the call for Black American settlement in Africa. Founded in Richmond, Virginia, by a group of white Presbyterian ministers, the ACS encouraged free blacks to emigrate to West Africa. Two years after its founding, the ACS, with funding provided by President Monroe, purchased a tract of land to the south of Sierra Leone. In 1822, the colony was named Liberia. While a number of Black Americans supported emigration, most were suspicious of the motives of the white ministers and their southern slaveholding supporters and strongly opposed the ACS. By the 1830s most Black Americans were convinced that the ACS was racist and conspiring to rid the U.S. of all Blacks. A number of Black Americans made impassioned statements about their contributions to the country and rejected any effort made towards dumping Blacks in Liberia. Many Black Americans even began referring to themselves as “colored,” forsaking the title of “African” in order to further emphasize their American identity over their African heritage.<sup>51</sup> The ACS, Fortune wrote,

has spent mints of money and tons of human blood in the selfish attempt to plant an Anglo-African colony on the West Coast of Africa. The money has been thrown away and the human lives have been sacrificed in vain. The black people of this country are Americans, not Africans; and any wholesale expatriation of them is altogether out of the question...<sup>52</sup>

Emigration to Africa, however, continued to attract some African-Americans, and became an even more alluring option during times when the future of Blacks in America seemed most ominous.

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<sup>50</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), 2.

<sup>51</sup> See footnote 10, Lynch, “Pan-Negro Nationalism in the New World, Before 1862,” 44.

<sup>52</sup> Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 670-671.

Initially, one of the most vociferous opponents of the ACS and emigration was Martin Delany who later became one of the most celebrated emigrationists. It was not until the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act that he became discouraged about the prospects of Blacks in the U.S. to the point where he supported emigration. By 1852, Delany had begun advocating emigration to Central and South America. By the late 1850s, though still against the work of the ACS and Black American settlement in Liberia, Delany was in favor of emigration to Africa. With a Jamaican-born travelmate, Delany traveled to Yorubaland in search of suitable land for Black American settlement.<sup>53</sup>

The end of the war intensified the emigration debate, and with an uncertain future ahead of them, many Black Americans became avid supporters of emigration. A. M. E. minister Henry McNeal Turner was one of the earliest voices to reinvigorate the debate on emigration in the United States. In 1866, Turner, also once an opponent of emigration, “converted” after hearing Alexander Crummel speak and in a letter to ACS secretary William Coppinger wrote, “I am taking the ground that we will never get justice here, that God is, and will, [continue to] withhold political rights from us, for the purpose of turning our attention to our fatherland.”<sup>54</sup> By 1867, 13 136 Black Americans had settled in the Liberian colony.<sup>55</sup>

Most Black Americans, however, were not so quick to support emigration after the Civil War. Many wanted to give the post-war reconstruction effort a chance. Immediately following the end of the war, mass meeting of blacks in Petersburg, Virginia, under the leadership of Rev. William E. Walker, Peter K. Jones, and Thomas Scott resolved that as, “colored citizens of Petersburg, Va., and true and loyal citizens of the United States of America,” they were entitled to “claim, as an unqualified right, the privilege of setting forth respectfully our grievances and demanding an equality of rights under the law.” They asserted that they had proved their loyalty in several Civil War battles and expressed “distinguished honor” at being the first regiment to

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<sup>53</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 75-76.

<sup>54</sup> Henry McNeal Turner, *Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, compiled and edited by Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1971), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Earle Anderson, *Liberia: America's African Friend* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 82.

march into the nearby Confederate capital of Richmond.<sup>56</sup> They were just one group of many who voiced their determination to be full-fledged U.S. citizens.

Yet, as Reconstruction gave way to segregation and violence, more Black Americans left the South and a significant number lent their voices to the emigration effort. In 1878 a much-evolved Martin Delany and South Carolina Blacks founded the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Company, a steamship service for the passage of Black Americans to Liberia. Though, the company only transferred one shipload of settlers to Liberia's shores before it went bankrupt, it did not lack interested parties.<sup>57</sup> Within the space of a few months in 1879 about 50 000 Black Americans, later known as the "Exodusters," left Mississippi, Louisiana, and East Texas for settlement in Kansas. Seven years later the African Emigration Society in Topeka, Kansas sent a memorial to Congress asking for its support in helping to send desirous Blacks to Africa.<sup>58</sup> In 1892, the minister of Atlanta's Bethel A.M.E. Church proclaimed that it was time for Blacks to "leave Georgia and go to their own country, Africa, where they would have equal rights and help govern and have street cars of their own."<sup>59</sup>

Black Americans began to leave the South in such droves that many southern towns became ghost cities, prompting some southern whites to even reexamine their discriminatory laws.<sup>60</sup> While most Black Americans remained in the U.S., enthusiasm for emigration to Africa, though rarely translated into action, was high as was interest in hearing about the exploits of Black Americans in Africa. One can imagine the euphoria that met the appearance of an article that appeared in Washington, D.C., in 1870. The piece spoke of a Black American seaman, Captain George Brooks, who "received his certificate as ship master in the spring of 1868, and sailed from the port of New York in command of a vessel manned entirely by colored seaman,

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<sup>56</sup> Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 536-538.

<sup>57</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 78.

<sup>58</sup> Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 648.

<sup>59</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Ellison, *The Black Experience*, 83-84.

bound to the coast of Africa, and to one or more ports in Europe, and back to the United States.”<sup>61</sup>

By this time, the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 had laid the foundation for the colonization of Africa by the major European countries, and general interest in Africa was at an all-time high. As Edward Wilmot Blyden so aptly pointed out, the second plundering of Africa occurred just as newly freed Black Americans began to revisit the option of African emigration. The excitement surrounding the “opening up” of the “Dark Continent” must have been inspiring for those Black Americans who envisioned the role they might play as the enlightened children of Africa, the continent’s rightful civilized heirs. It is likely that a number of those Black Americans who boarded steamers heading for West Africa, had attended one of the many talks given by the boisterous twenty-eight year old Black American Presbyterian missionary William Henry Sheppard who spoke all over the South in the early 1890s. Virginia-born Sheppard was fresh from a visit with Queen Victoria who had honored him for penetrating the city of the Kuba kings, when he began speaking to black college students, future missionaries, and others in the southern states about his years in King Leopold’s Congo.<sup>62</sup> Surely, Sheppard’s confidence and the heavy medal from Queen Victoria that hung from his neck, confirmed to many Black Americans that Blacks could indeed make a name for themselves in Africa, could find the justice that proved so elusive in the U.S.

Establishing a place where Black Americans could thrive unhindered was the primary concern of Harry Foster Dean, a grandson of Paul Cuffee, who in 1904, sailed his own ship, the *Pedro Gorino*, to Cape Town. Like other supporters of Black American emigration, he was convinced that no race was complete without a native land of its own. As a young man, he vowed that his seafaring days would be devoted to securing this right for Blacks – to use his ship to scout out such a land. “I determined some day to start a campaign based upon the eternal truth that a race without ships is like a man stricken and blind,” he said, “I would instigate a movement to rehabilitate Africa and found such an Ethiopian Empire as the world has never seen. It would be greater than the empire in Haiti... It would be greater than the empires of

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<sup>61</sup> Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 623.

<sup>62</sup> Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: A True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth-Century Congo* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 109, 111. Kennedy presents a fairly clear picture of Sheppard, though her work seems to drip with a misplaced nostalgia for the Old South.



Africa's past... Africa would again lift up her head. Her fleets would sail upon the sea. Her resources would once more enrich her own children."<sup>63</sup> Dean remained in southern Africa for almost a decade, taking advantage of the opportunities for independent cargo ships to transport goods along the coast between Cape Town and Delagoa Bay. Though he was clearly interested in the financial gain afforded by work in the shipping industry he claimed to have been primarily interested in building an African Empire for the benefit of Black Americans and the black race.

Black American migration peaked in the second decade of the twentieth century, and as before almost all of these migrants headed north or westwards. By then, the tiny trickle of African-Americans boarding boats for Africa had all but ceased as the nation went to war. In response to the need to replace white workers during the First World War, between 200 000 and 350 000 Blacks moved from the South to the North between 1915 and 1918. Africa had not lost its pull completely, though. Sometime around the first World War, another Thomas Scott of the Petersburg-Richmond, Virginia area, possibly a son or grandson of the Thomas Scott who spoke on behalf of Black civil rights in 1865, boarded a ship, which discharged him in Cape Town.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

In general, Afro-Caribbean migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was characterized by the movement of labor between the islands and the South and Central American main lands. Migration in the United States, however, was confined almost entirely to the mainland with blacks leaving the South for the new western and northern states. Emigration to Africa was a topic of discussion among blacks in both the Caribbean and the United States, though it was most vehemently debated among black intellectuals. Most African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were simply concerned with making a living, without having any care as to which continent was ideologically best suited for their inhabitation. Thus, most blacks in the Americas remained there, with only a small portion ever venturing across the Atlantic to Africa and Europe.

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<sup>63</sup> Harry Dean, *Umbala: The Adventures of a Negro Sea-Captain in Africa and on the Seven Seas in his Attempts to Found an Ethiopian Empire, an Autobiographical Narrative by Captain Harry Dean* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 69-70.

<sup>64</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

## **“American Negroes”**

Regardless of whether they left their homes in the Americas in search of employment opportunities or in an effort to uplift Africa and fulfill the prophecy of black redemption, most African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans who lived in Cape Town found the city to be relatively full of promise for young blacks. Using their common experiences in the Americas as a basis, African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans came to form a sub-community of their own in Cape Town and were known collectively as ‘American Negroes’.

### First Impressions of Cape Town

In April 1902, twenty-year-old Robert Gonsalves was discharged from a British merchant ship docked at Simonstown in the southern peninsula of the Cape Colony. He was a handsome and lanky young man— six feet seven and a half inches— with a ship’s heart tattooed on his left arm.<sup>1</sup> Gonsalves had hastily decided to make the two-month journey between Britain and the Cape just weeks after being discharged in northeast England from the crew of the *Lady Salisbury*. Like a number of other sailors on British merchant ships at the time, Gonsalves was a young Afro-Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> He was just one of many thousands of West Indians who took up lives on the sea or in other lands in response to poor living and working conditions on their home islands. He had left his home in St. Johns, Antigua, at the age of seventeen and found employment as a seaman in the British home trade.<sup>3</sup>

Gonsalves probably first arrived in northern Europe in February 1900 when he was paid in Glasgow for serving “a period of about eight months” on the barque *Orion*.<sup>4</sup> He appears to have been based in London for the next two years where he found work on the many ships that

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<sup>1</sup> Paper Ticket issued by the Shipping Federation, 20 December 1901, in the possession of Gwen Pimm.

<sup>2</sup> Copley, “‘Far From Home,’” 351-357; Certificate of Discharge, Robert Gonsalves, 1902, in the possession of Gwen Pimm.

<sup>3</sup> Copley, 354. Florence Sauls, personal interview, 9 March 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Swedish and Norwegian Vice Consulate, 19 February 1900, in the possession of Gwen Pimm.

traversed the northern seas.<sup>5</sup> Though it is unclear when he first arrived in London, the years he spent there would have been a heady time for those in the British Empire. J. R. Hooker notes that the summer of 1902, Gonsalves's first in Europe, was "a good one" for the British Empire and its loyal subjects. Britain had just officially—but not actually—won its war against the independent Boer Republics in southern Africa and rested easier knowing that it had complete control over the vast veins of gold found in the northernmost republic. Evidenced by the pro-British handkerchiefs, playing cards featuring the faces of war personalities, mugs, and other war paraphernalia that were popular in London among the pro-British, the war had taken on symbolic proportions.<sup>6</sup> For many, the conflict not only had the potential of enriching the mighty British Empire's coffers, but also represented a battle between the "civilized" and "uncivilized" world. Indeed, the British Empire had come to be the very symbol of civilization—bringing egalitarian law, Christianity, and other supposed markers of social progress wherever it spread. For many Britons and those they colonized, the War was just as much an endeavor to bring Englishness to the racially segregated Boer colonies.<sup>7</sup> In fact, even for those who had no connection to the Empire, it was a powerful symbol of freedom and justice. Alluding to the passage of Black American slaves from the southern states, through the North and into Canada, A.M.E. Bishop L. J. Coppin praised "the theory of the English government that under the British flag all subjects are equal... this fact," he continued, "has caused the man of color to love the "Union Jack" and feel safe beneath its folds. Many a fugitive from hatred and oppression has, after a weary journey and untold hardships, rejoiced at last to plant his bleeding feet upon British soil and bless the name of the people who had reached the noblest height in civilization."<sup>8</sup> A British victory in the South African War was expected to cause an expansion of these attributes so often associated

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<sup>5</sup> Three Certificates of Discharge place Gonsalves on the crews of three different ships between 26 March 1901 and the 8<sup>th</sup> of January or February 1902. There appears to be a mistake on the last Certificate of Discharge, which first lists the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1902 as the date of discharge and later lists the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. These Certificates of Discharge are in the possession of Gwen Pimm.

<sup>6</sup> *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa*, 261.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1970), 15.

<sup>8</sup> L.J. Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa, 1900-1904* (Philadelphia: 1905), 69-70.

with English rule. For those loyal to Britain and its values, the war was another opportunity to spread the benefits of empire.

The jubilation surrounding British Imperial hegemony was not lost on black West Indians, many of whom—particularly the elite—were eager to assert their Englishness and support for the British cause. Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams was a staunch supporter of the British Empire and what he saw as the progressive effect it had on those lands and peoples it colonized. Williams even applied to serve in the British forces in South Africa, but was turned down like many other black volunteers.<sup>9</sup> The first West Indian cricket team competed in England in the summer of 1900 and performed surprisingly well. In their wake, West Indians were left with a sense of accomplishment and vindication. Cricket was what Hooker calls “the quintessentially English sport” that “stood for all that black Englishmen... admired in British life.” The team’s showing had proved that West Indians—black and white—were indeed capable of holding their own in what many English and West Indians alike perceived to be the superior world of the British metropole. Hooker keenly observes that the success of the West Indian cricket team—proof that West Indians were certifiably British—and the excitement surrounding what appeared to be a British victory in the South African War, made for an exhilarating summer for West Indians who felt that the Empire’s glory was their own.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams who arrived in Cape Town just one year after Gonsalves, was convinced that a British victory in South Africa would be a boon for equality and racial justice in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> Gonsalves, however, needed not to have been an overt Empire enthusiast or even of elite standing to be swept along by this Imperial fever and it is no surprise that he and hundreds of other West Indians traveled to South Africa as crewmembers on British ships during such an exciting time.

Gonsalves’ primary reason for traveling to Cape Town via London, however, was probably a response to the high demand for sailors to man ships to the Cape and for dockworkers in the colony’s harbor. In the midst of war, the Cape’s harbors were crowded with ships laden

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Saunders, “From Trinidad to Cape Town: The First Black Lawyer at the Cape.” *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 55, no.4 (June 2001): 147.

<sup>10</sup> Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Saunders, “From Trinidad to Cape Town,” 147.

with supplies for the colony and its troops. Black American sailor Harry Dean recalled finding “the harbor crowded with warships and transports,” when he arrived in Table Bay during the war, and such conditions would have demanded a great increase in dock labor. Though as a black Antiguan and descendant of West African slaves, Gonsalves probably would have had preconceptions about Africa and possibly even been driven to its shores by a sense of connection with the continent; he like most other sailors seems to have made his way to the tip of Africa to find employment.<sup>12</sup> For interested sailors, work between England and the Cape Colony was plentiful and profitable. Not only were they assured of earning above-average wages, but they were secure in knowing that even the southernmost parts of Africa rested, albeit uneasily, in the bosom of the mighty and just British Empire.

Though Gonsalves’ expectations of the Cape are unknown, his introduction to the colony must have been noteworthy. April 1902 brought real hope for the end of the South African War, which had evolved into a bloody guerilla fighting. Gonsalves arrived in Simonstown just four days after the first meeting between the British and Boer governments in Vereeniging to discuss the final end to the South African War. On his second day in the Cape, the *Cape Times* hinted at a possible end to the fighting when it reported on “Peace Overtures” between the three governments.<sup>13</sup> Nearly a month and a half later, the Boer Republics relinquished their sovereignty and agreed to enter the British Empire as the Transvaal and Orange Free State colonies. The British had claimed two more colonies for their queen, one of which—the Transvaal—was the producer of a quarter of the world’s gold. British colonialists surely saw the victory as a reassurance of British hegemony and an act of providence. And though Gonsalves may have been near the bottom of the colonial hierarchy, he may have actually found comfort in this testament to the strength of the British Empire. Not only had the Empire become a powerful symbol of human achievement and civilization, it also forged a union between the Cape and his home in the British West Indies. Upon being discharged from the ship, Gonsalves may have picked up a copy of that day’s *Cape Times* to get his bearings and after noticing a small article

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<sup>12</sup> This should be of no surprise as J.R. Hooker notes that even Henry Sylvester Williams, convener of the first Pan African Conference, appears to have, “not thought much about the ancestral continent until he reached London.” J. R. Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams: Imperial Pan-Africanist*. London: Rex Collings, 1975, 22. This is not to say that Williams had never thought of Africa or had notions about what it was like or how he might be connected to the continent. It is likely, though, that his thoughts were never sufficiently developed for him to act upon them in any way.

<sup>13</sup> “Peace Overtures,” *Cape Times*, 21 April 1902.

about the archbishop of the West Indies and his activities in Kingston, Jamaica, may have felt as though he was not so far from the Caribbean after all.<sup>14</sup>

Arriving in Simonstown in mid-April, Gonsalves may have been surprised to find that the Cape was subject to strong winds and often very chilly conditions. If he had expected, like many modern-day newcomers to the Cape, hot and balmy “African” weather, he would have been shocked. Though the temperature rarely ever dipped below 25° C, or 78° F, in the sugar-producing colony of Antigua,<sup>15</sup> temperatures in Cape Town were known to hover above freezing on some winter days. Perhaps, though, the Cape’s climate would have been welcoming after his years on the waters of northern Europe. And it is possible that Gonsalves, like another black Antiguan, thought the Cape reminded him of home.<sup>16</sup> Certainly his years in London would have prepared him for the bustle of Cape Town, which was a rapidly growing and cosmopolitan city that was emerging as a jewel in the crown of British imperialism.

Sixty-two years before Gonsalves arrived in the city, it was a small town of about twenty thousand people. After a series of economic depressions beginning in the 1860s, the city experienced a flurry of economic booms that culminated during the South African War and lasted until shortly thereafter.<sup>17</sup> When diamonds were discovered in what would become Kimberley in 1867, the Cape, once considered only a strategic backwater colony, instantly became the focus of imperial attention. Responding to this sudden upgrade in status and the promises of a thriving economy, the Cape Government spent nearly £1 000 000 renovating the Table Bay Harbor. Between 1873 and 1883, corresponding with the discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1871, the government also provided the funds for a railway and several thousand miles of telegraph cable. An additional £3 000 000 was spent on the busy harbor between 1891 and 1902 and £200 000 on the city’s railway station. In 1895 another dock was opened called

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<sup>14</sup> *Cape Times*, 19 April 1902.

<sup>15</sup> Raye R. Platt, John K. Wright, and John C. Weaver, *The European Possessions in the Caribbean Area* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1941), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Cape Town reminded Antiguan Henry Isaacs of home. See Robert Trent Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans: Garveyism in Segregationist South Africa, 1920-1940,” Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2001, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cobley, ““Far From Home,”” 354. Vivian Bickford-Smith, “Black Labour at the Docks at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” in *Studies in the History of Cape Town*. Vol. 2, edited by Christopher Saunders and Howard Phillips, Cape Town: History Department in Association with the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1980, 89.

Victoria Basin helping the city to import £14 000 000 worth of goods—3 ½ times more than imported in 1891.<sup>18</sup>

The city's newfound riches were also impetus to redesign the cityscape—which was dominated by remnants of its Dutch past—into something befitting a thriving British colony. In due time, the effects of British imperialism gradually replaced the Dutch influences. Vivian Bickford-Smith characterizes the time as a “golden period for Cape Town merchants” who benefited from the city's expanded capacity for import. The city reflected their fortune as a number of fancy retail shops opened in Cape Town's center. These new shops, with their distinctly Victorian architecture, helped to anglicize the previously Dutch city and were testaments to the growing influence of the British in southern Africa.<sup>19</sup> By 1902, the city would boast of a center that had been almost entirely rebuilt in the Victorian style to reflect what one writer called the, “splendid audacity of national egotism that has been acknowledged to be one of the secrets of our mastery in British colonization.”<sup>20</sup> In a matter of a few decades Cape Town had been transformed into a proud British city.

Cape Town's transformation was also reflected in its dramatic population growth. Between 1875 and 1891, the city's population grew by 34 000 as people flocked to the city for employment. Between 1891 and 1904 the city saw a massive influx of around 21 000 Coloured people from the rural areas surrounding the city and 2 000 Indian laborers.<sup>21</sup> Africans also made headway in Cape Town where many found work on the docks. In 1891 there were only 800 Africans in the city. By 1899, whites in Cape Town feared a “kaffir invasion” as the African population numbered in the thousands. By the turn of the century, the city and its suburbs were home to some 140 000 people.<sup>22</sup> Many of these newcomers settled in the city's sixth district,

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<sup>18</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12, 129.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 129 and 132.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 136.

<sup>21</sup> See Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, 11-12 and 129; Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987), 12.

which became the eclectic, crowded, and in many respects impoverished home to Russian Jews, Indians, Chinese, Australians, Coloureds, Africans from the Eastern Cape and other parts of southern Africa, West Indians, Black Americans, and others.

The comments of African-American Ralph J. Bunche who visited District Six a few decades later in 1937 when it suffered from a more acute poverty, are particularly helpful in understanding the impression District Six left upon African-American visitors and settlers. He made a number of remarks about the community's diversity. In his travel notes, Bunche made particular note of the colorfulness of District Six's people and the many different cultures, and customs he saw being practiced on its streets. He wrote that he saw, "very brown mothers with very fair babies and vice versa." While on Hanover Street, the district's main thoroughfare, he commented that it was, "crowded with colored of every description, with flower vendors lining the curbs." Bunche took note of the soiled street urchins and was shocked by the many young girls wearing false teeth to replace those they had pulled in order to keep up with what was and continues to be a fashion trend among some Coloureds in the Cape.<sup>23</sup> Though "Malays" and "Coloureds" dominated the district,<sup>24</sup> it was an ethnically diverse community. By 1902 when Robert Gonsalves arrived, District Six was still a vibrant neighborhood; though it had lost a bit of its famed diversity just a year earlier. After an outbreak of Bubonic plague in 1901 the city, blaming this and most other social ills on newly arrived Africans, began building the Uitvlugt location for its African residents on the outer limits of the city. By the middle of 1901, the only Africans that lived in the city center were those who were there illegally or with special permission.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, Cape Town was emerging as an important world center backed by what appeared to be the invincible British Empire. Up until at least 1900 housing in the city center was generally available for most people. West Indian and American immigrants, "could see the value of the country," the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant said, "there was money to be made

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<sup>22</sup>See Vivian Bickford-Smith, "The Origins and Early History of District Six," *Cabo: Historical Society of Cape Town* 4, no.2 (1997): 1 and Bickford-Smith, "Black Ethnicities, Communities and Political Expression in Late Victorian Cape Town," *Journal of African History* 36, no. 3 (1995): 443.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph J. Bunche, *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937-1 January 1938*, edited by Robert R. Edgar (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 53, 59.

<sup>24</sup> Bickford-Smith, "The Origins and Early History of District Six," 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa*, 314.



here.”<sup>26</sup> A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin recalled, “Those of the population who had wealth, and were disposed to do so, lived in mansions in ‘the gardens,’ or out at ‘Green Point,’ or in some one of the beautiful villas between Cape Town and Simon’s Bay... While the poorer class had no difficulty in getting small houses at very reasonable rates, wages were fair, work plentiful and food products quoted at reasonable prices. Thus, everything was brought within the range of comfortable living for all classes, and any industrious person with a little push could easily keep the wolf from the door.” Of course, with the massive population increase in Cape Town during and after the South African War, rent and food prices increased with demand. This was not to be so much a deterrent as it was incentive—for those able—to look beyond the city’s limits to the suburbs. By February 1903, Bishop Coppin remarked that hundreds of coloured and African people had purchased small plots of land on which to build homes.<sup>27</sup> Thus, even in a time of economic depression, Cape Town offered many opportunities for a wide swath of its people and interested newcomers. Perhaps encouraged by the excitement of such a rapidly growing city, its cosmopolitan nature, employment opportunities, lifestyle possibilities, and familiar British overtones, Gonsalves decided to remain. He eventually became a painter making £10 a month, just under the high of £12 a month for unionized painters in the city. Gonsalves married twice, had a family, and established himself in District Six.<sup>28</sup> Gonsalves, thus, became one of what probably amounted to a few hundred black men and women from the West Indies and the United States who were said to have “jumped ship”—in reference to the maritime background many of them shared—and came to call Cape Town home.

### Numbers

The number of Black Americans and West Indians living in the Cape peaked during the period surrounding Gonsalves’ arrival in the Cape. According to censuses conducted in the Cape, the number of Black Americans and West Indians living in the Colony increased dramatically

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<sup>26</sup> Agnes Absalom, phone interview by author, 7 March 2003.

<sup>27</sup> L.J. Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa, 1900-1904*. Philadelphia: 1905, 23-24.

<sup>28</sup> Florence Sauls, personal interview by author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003; Vivian Bickford-Smith, “Labour, Ethnicity and Conflict in Cape Town, 1891-1902.” Paper presented at “Cape Town History Project Workshop, 11-12 November 1991, 16.

between 1875 and 1904 (see Table 1). In 1904, 483 people classified as “mixed/other” were of Caribbean or American origin.<sup>29</sup> This is an almost 138 per cent increase over the number reported in 1891. Between 1875 and 1891, shortly after the discovery of gold, the number of “mixed/other” Americans and West Indians rose by 410 per cent. The overwhelming majority of these immigrants to the Cape were from the Caribbean. And of these, most were from the British West Indies. Eighty-five per cent of those from the British islands in the Caribbean were from Barbados, British Guiana, or Jamaica—those colonies, which either had long traditions of Black independence and industry or a shortage of available land. According to the 1904 census, 93 were definitely from the U.S. and another 96 were possibly from the U.S. Indeed Robert A. Hill and Gregory A. Pirio were probably correct in stating that the *Cape Argus* may have mistaken West Indians for Americans when it reported that there were “200 American Negroes in Cape Town alone.”<sup>30</sup> And though most of the Black American and West Indian immigrants were men, there were twenty-one women—only six of whom were from the West Indies. Only three women identified through this research were likely to have been West Indian—a Mrs. Moses who was married to a West Indian, Mr. Moses, Judith Murphy who returned to the West Indies in 1902, and possibly Annie Lewis who left for the West Indies with her husband in 1904.<sup>31</sup> The small number of West Indian women is probably due to the fact that most West Indians arrived in Cape Town as sailors, whereas many of the Black Americans in Cape Town arrived as missionaries. Surely there were more women missionaries than sailors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>29</sup> Of these, 93 who reported that they were simply from “America” and 93 who reported being from “North America” may have been from South or Central America.

<sup>30</sup> Robert A. Hill and Gregory A. Pirio, “‘Africa for the Africans’: the Garvey Movement in South Africa, 1920-1940,” in *The Politics of Race Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, edited by Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The Regents of the University of California), 216.

<sup>31</sup> Kathryn Williams, phone interview by author. 28 February 2003. A.M.E. Church Members Roll Book, Comencing [sic] May 1898, Archives of Bethel Memorial A.M.E. Church, Hazendal.

Table 1: "Mixed/Other" Population of Caribbean and American Origin in the Cape Colony, 1875-1904									
	1875			1891			1904		
Birthplace	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F
<i>British Possessions:</i>									
Antigua	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Barbados	-	-	-	3	3	-	34	34	-
Bermuda	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-
British Guiana	-	-	-	-	-	-	31	30	1
Demerara(Guyana)	1	1	-	2	2	-	-	-	-
Dominica	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	-
Jamaica	2	1	1	22	22	-	27	27	-
Montserrat	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
St. Kitts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
St. Lucia	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
St. Vincent	1	-	1	-	-	-	4	4	-
Tobago	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Trinidad	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-
Turks Island	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
<i>Other States:</i>									
Cuba	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Curacao	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-
Danish West Indies	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
French Guiana	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Haiti	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-
Martinique	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-
St. Thomas	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
United States	35	31	4	45	44	1	93	82	11
<i>Unspecified:</i>									
America	2	2	-	51	47	4	93	89	4
North America	-	-	-	4	4	-	3	3	-
West Indies	-	-	-	74	74	-	178	173	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>21</b>

Source: *Census of the Colony of the Cape Of Good Hope... 1875*, Census Tables Part I. Table IX – 'Birth-places' Sub-divisions of Groups'.  
*Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope... 1891*, Annexures Part II, Table VIII- 'Birthplaces of the People in Detail, including Sub-divisions of Groups'.  
*Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope... 1904*, Annexures Part II, Table IX – Birthplaces of People in Detail, including Sub-divisions of Groups'.

### Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town

A far greater number of West Indians, particularly from the British islands, were present in Cape Town than Black Americans. This may be largely attributable to the earlier date of emancipation in the British West Indies and the British imperialist connection between the West Indies and the Cape. After 1838, blacks in the British West Indies were generally free to find employment wherever they wished whereas before 1863, most black Americans would have gone through a considerable amount of trouble to reach Cape Town. Likewise, black West Indians were more likely to have found themselves in South Africa because of their position within the British world. The interdependence between the Empire and its Caribbean colonies would have made the transition from migrant labor within the Caribbean to migrant labor within the British Empire an easy one. Even those West Indians who were not from British colonies

in the Caribbean were more likely to consider looking for work on the ship route between the West Indies, England and Cape Town because of their proximity to the British world in the Caribbean and ready access to British ships looking for crews.

Most Black West Indians living in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were seamen from the British possessions in the Caribbean. Others remained in the Cape as dockworkers after serving time the West Indian Regiment in the South African War. To be certain, most of them did not actually set out from their islands in order to settle in Cape Town. Most, as Alan Copley notes, arrived in the Cape as seamen like Robert Gonsalves – somewhat “haphazardly”— as they searched for work. Many had been enticed by the relatively high wages earned by seamen employed on Atlantic ship routes. A seaman sailing between the West Indies and Liverpool could expect £2.15s. The Liverpool-South Africa route was worth £3.0s. Those sailors who manned independently operated ships were often given a share of the profit earned from the ship’s cargo.<sup>32</sup>

Most West Indian migrant workers were not so much interested in settling in their colonies of employment permanently as they were in supporting themselves, and perhaps family, back in the West Indies. Many West Indian migrant workers relished returning home and the attention they were given from those who had remained behind. They often returned to their islands clad in ostentatious clothing so as to identify themselves as among those who had traveled abroad and succeeded.<sup>33</sup> Cape Town, however, presented different options to many of the seamen. While a few of the West Indians who found themselves in Cape Town either returned home or attempted to return home, many remained because employment opportunities and general livelihood were often better in the Cape than in the West Indies. Several, like Alfred William Payne from Montserrat, passed through Cape Town on their way to the diamond or gold mines. Payne later returned to Cape Town where he worked on the docks as a caulker.<sup>34</sup>

During the South African War, demand for dockworkers was high, as were wages. With the end of the war, though, the concern of the Table Bay Harbor Board shifted to creating and maintaining a bottomless pool of cheap labor in order to maximize the return on the

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<sup>32</sup> Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 352, 354.

<sup>33</sup> Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World*, 136.

<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Williams, phone interview by author, 28 February 2003.

government's investment in the harbor.<sup>35</sup> It found its answer in black migrant workers from Delagoa Bay and the Eastern Cape who being far from home, were more inclined to remain in Cape Town earning low wages than to trek back home. According to the son of one Barbadian immigrant, many of the West Indian dockworkers were foremen who were hired by the Table Bay Harbor Board to supervise these workers.<sup>36</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith writes that 'headmen' and 'native foremen' were used at the turn of the century in order to control the supply of African labor, which fluctuated and was prone to desertion in favor of better employment in the city. Serving as liaisons between the Board and African employees, headmen were charged with preventing desertions, recruiting labor, and ensuring the safe passage of laborers to and from the docks. The position of 'native foreman' was established in response to preference being shown by coloured foreman to coloured workers. With so many African dockworkers, such preference for coloured workers was counterproductive. 'Native foremen' were expected to work more closely with the dockworkers—ensuring that they went to work as required and did their tasks properly.<sup>37</sup> One can imagine that the greatest advantage in having African foremen was that they could converse with the workers in their own languages. This would suggest, that it was more likely for the West Indian dockworkers, largely English-speaking, to have been headmen. Regardless of whether they were headmen or foremen, it is important to note that they did have leadership roles at the docks. In fact, many were referred to as "sarang"—an old Afrikaans word meaning supervisor—both at work on the docks and during their personal time when they were not working.<sup>38</sup>

With so many West Indians in Cape Town it is no wonder that they created a network among themselves whereby newcomers were welcomed to Cape Town and found employment. Trinidadian James Wilson, an established businessman and labor contractor helped West Indian newcomers find work in the docks. Antiguan and dockworker Samuel Marsh often welcomed

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<sup>35</sup> Bickford-Smith, "Black Labour at the Docks at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," 76, 98.

<sup>36</sup> Derra Orderson, Personal interview by author, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, 27 March 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Donald Kleinsmidt and Edward William Walker, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003; Barbadian Joseph Orderson was referred to as "sarang." Derra Orderson, personal interview by author, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, 27 March 2003.

those newly arrived from the West Indies.<sup>39</sup> And though the majority of West Indians in Cape Town were seamen who found employment on the docks, several were self-employed artisans or professionals. Jamaican Amos Absalom, who attended school in New York with his brothers and then joined the U.S. navy, worked as an engineer in Simonstown and Cape Town.<sup>40</sup> Antiguan Henry Isaacs, who worked on the docks when he first arrived in Cape Town, eventually found employment as a French polisher and woodworker.<sup>41</sup> Henry Sylvester Williams arrived in Cape Town in 1903 where he became the first black person to practice at the Cape bar.<sup>42</sup> Rawson Walter Wooding was a musician and schoolteacher from British Guiana, while Arthur Cecil Grainger was a motor mechanic from St. Vincent.<sup>43</sup>

#### African-Americans in Cape Town

Keletso Atkins who has done groundbreaking research on the Black American presence in South Africa asserts that the earliest arrival of Black Americans in the southernmost part of the continent took place in the late seventeenth century. This, however, was an isolated incident. According to Atkins, the abundance of evidence that links Black Americans to what would become South Africa only points to those years after 1783 when the newly independent American nation began sending merchant ships and whalers to the region. As a basis for this assertion, Atkins refers to research that has found that nearly all American vessels in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean had at least one Black American crewmember and that whalers often had crews that were 40% to 50% Black American. These American ships often stopped in Table Bay to give their crews liberty, stock up on supplies, or perform repairs on their vessels. Because

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<sup>39</sup> Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 359

<sup>40</sup> Agnes Absalom, phone interview by author, 7 March 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 359. It might be interesting to see what other skills black West Indians brought with them to Cape Town. The turn of the century saw Cape Town being remodeled as a Victorian City, which necessitated the immigration of white workers from Britain who were able to perform the work required of Victorian architecture. Perhaps, Afro-Caribbeans performed these jobs as well. See, Bickford-Smith, “Labour, Ethnicity and Conflict in Cape Town, 1891-1902.” Paper presented at “Cape Town History Project Workshop, 11-12 November 1991, 20-22.

<sup>42</sup> Saunders, “From Trinidad to Cape Town,” 147.

<sup>43</sup> Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 359.

Cape Town did not yet prevent particular groups of sailors from landing, Black Americans were free to enter the city.<sup>44</sup> It is unlikely that these early visitors to the Cape remained.

It is clear, though, that at least by the mid-nineteenth century, some African-Americans had settled permanently in the South Africa. Atkins has uncovered evidence that a number of Black Americans arrived in South Africa—some as fugitive slaves—before the American Civil War began in 1861. In 1859, a faction of the National Emigration Convention journeyed to Cape Town and then to Natal in search of land suitable for Black American colonization. Though the delegation was not successful in Cape Town, it did find support among Natal planters who were eager to begin cotton production and saw Black Americans as the perfect laborers for their scheme. In 1862, a Black American man was brought before a Durban magistrate for suggesting to an African woman that she should desert her indenture because slavery was illegal in the British Empire. Another, Yankee Wood, arrived in South Africa just after the Civil War. He settled in Kokstad where he opened a hotel and established a newspaper.<sup>45</sup> Andrew Jackson, from Richmond, Virginia—the capital of the rebel Confederate States during the Civil War—left the United States as early as 1838, but probably no later than 1850<sup>46</sup> and settled in Cape Town where he became a draper. It is not clear whether Jackson was a stowaway or a freeman when he left the U.S.

The numerical presence of Black Americans in South Africa, however, never amounted to much, and at any time, most were probably affiliated with missionary work, and only in the city temporarily. Clement T. Keto estimates that there were never more than 100 Africa-Americans in all of South Africa between 1890 and 1910. F.Z.S. Peregrino, the editor of a popular Coloured Cape Town newspaper, reported in 1902 that when he asked a black American resident to collect the signatures of all other black Americans in the city, “after a thorough canvas [he] succeeded in obtaining less than a score of signatures, and he is acquainted with

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<sup>44</sup> Keletso E. Atkins, “The ‘Black Atlantic Communication Network’: African American Sailors and the Cape of Good Hope Connection.” *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 24, no.2 (1992): 23-25, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Citing Keletso Atkins, “Questionable Haven: African American Emigrants in South Africa,” paper presented to the African Studies Association Meeting, St. Louis, November 1991, in Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 126.

<sup>46</sup> I have arrived at these years by accounting for the end of slavery in Cape Town and the ages at which I think Andrew Jackson would most likely have left the U.S, between 24 and 30, and decided to settle in such a distant foreign land. According to Andrew Jackson’s death notice he died in 1884 at the age of 70. Andrew Jackson, Death Notice, MOOC 6/9/208, Cape Town Archives Repository.

every American Negro in the city.”<sup>47</sup> Though there were never many Black Americans in South Africa, their presence, particularly after 1890, has been greatly noted and their influence strong.<sup>48</sup>

The small cohort of Black Americans living in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely affiliated with Christian missionary work, though there were some Black Americans who came under other auspices. Some, like Thomas Scott, arrived in the city as sailors on American merchant ships. Scott, from Richmond, Virginia, is likely to have arrived in Cape Town shortly after the First World War on a U.S. ship.<sup>49</sup> Like other seamen, Scott found work on the Cape Town docks. Kid Gardener from Texas and another Black American seaman arrived in Cape Town after joining the crew of a ship from New Orleans, which carried stores for the British government.<sup>50</sup> The overwhelming majority of Black Americans were associated with mission work, though. Being a port city and the oldest site of European settlement, Cape Town was South Africa’s major point of departure and arrival for transatlantic travelers. Many missionaries first established churches in Cape Town while they prepared for the more arduous task of reaping souls in the hinterland. The Baptist church was the first to establish a station in South Africa when it sent Rev. R. A. Jackson, a Black American man, in 1894.<sup>51</sup> Rev. Jackson founded the Colored Baptist Church on Buitengracht Street. In just five years, the Baptist Church had ordained twenty-three ministers and preachers at thirty-five missionary stations and had 2 000 members. By 1904 there were Baptist missionary stations in all four colonies.<sup>52</sup> Two years after Jackson established a Baptist mission in Cape Town, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E) attracted many of the leaders of the independent Ethiopian Churches—established throughout South Africa by Blacks who had grown weary of the racial discrimination that prevailed in white churches—into its flock. At the request of its

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<sup>47</sup> F. Z. S. Peregrino, “American or West Indian –Which?” *South African Spectator* (Cape Town), 23 August 1902.

<sup>48</sup> For more on Black Americans in South Africa, see Keto, “Black Americans and South Africa, 1890-1910.”

<sup>49</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003. From bits of conversation he overheard as a child, Scott believes that his mother’s father was West Indian. Daughter of an Afro-Caribbean Frances Peters remembers both of Leslie Scott’s parents being “foreigners.” Frances Peters, personal interview by author. Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, 28 February 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Dean, *Umbala*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Chirenje, J. Mutero. *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Keto, “Black Americans and South Africa, 1890-1910,” 393.



ministers, the Ethiopian church was absorbed by the A.M.E. church, beginning what James T. Campbell called, “the most important point of connection between black America and black South Africa between 1890 and 1930.”<sup>53</sup>

On 22 May 1898, A. M. E. Bishop and emigrationist Henry McNeal Turner who oversaw the amalgamation of the Ethiopian and A.M.E. churches, preached to a Cape Town audience on the “Unity of Race” and “The Spiritual Crisis of the World,” which pointed to Black American ‘progress’ as a model to be followed by South Africans.<sup>54</sup> Among the listeners was Francis McDonald Gow, the son of a St. Kitts couple who was born in San Francisco. Gow lived in District Six with his wife Sarah Adriaanse, a young coloured woman from Victoria West.<sup>55</sup> Upon moving to Cape Town, Gow became the leader of a congregation that held services in St. Paul’s Hall on Bree Street in the district. Like most of the congregation that heard Bishop Turner preach, Gow took his message to heart. Just three days after the sermons, Gow helped organize the Bethel Memorial Church, the first A. M. E. church in Cape Town. Bethel’s first minister was Alexander A. Morrison, another West Indian, ordained by Bishop Turner during his visit. Initially, the Bethel congregation met at St. Paul’s Hall and was, presumably, comprised mainly of those who attended F.M. Gow’s original spiritual services. Morrison served as Bethel’s pastor for two years until he headed north to Kimberley. The congregation later moved to its own church building in December 1901, which was built on Blythe Street, just off of Hanover Street in District Six. After 1899, Gow became more influential in the church and sold his business so that he could enter the ministry. F.M. Gow served as Bethel’s pastor from 1900-1930.<sup>56</sup> The establishment of Bethel A.M.E. was perhaps the most profound collaboration between black Americans and West Indians in Cape Town. Bethel A.M.E. became the center of

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<sup>53</sup> James T. Campbell, “Towards a Transnational Comparative History,” paper presented at Beyond White Supremacy: Towards a New Agenda for the Comparative Histories of South Africa and the United States, University of London School of Advanced Study Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1997, 24.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 137.

<sup>55</sup> Hilda Adriaanse, personal interview by author, Green Haven, Cape Town, 9 May 2002.

<sup>56</sup> “Bethel Memorial A. M. E. Church, Hazendal,” District Six Museum Archives. Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 160; Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, 13; “Opening of Bethel A.M.E. Church,” *South African Spectator*, 7 December 1901. For more information on A.A. Morrison and his travels throughout South Africa, see Cobley, “‘Far From Home,’” 364.

the Afro-Caribbean and African-American community and cemented the two groups that collectively were known as ‘American Negroes’.

#### ‘American Negroes’

Perhaps most notable about the Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans living in Cape Town was the manner in which they identified themselves collectively as a distinct community. Known popularly as ‘American Negroes’ by local Capetonians, this patchwork community of black immigrants was unified by their foreignness to Cape Town and by a set of shared beliefs and values, not by any preexisting common identity. This diverse “American Negro” community only existed in Cape Town, and was thus a product of the imagination of local Capetonians and that of the varied members of the community.

Local Capetonians often had difficulty distinguishing between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans and tended to identify any English-speaking black person who was relatively dark-skinned as an ‘American Negro.’<sup>57</sup> The daughter of a Jamaican immigrant joked that even the women whom the West Indian men married did not know the difference between West Indians and Black Americans.<sup>58</sup> This is largely because Capetonians, knowing that many Blacks in the Americas spoke English as a first language, assumed that any English-speaking Black person had to be from the Americas. Capetonians were not, however, sensitive to the fact that the Americas were made up of dozens of countries each with its own set of identities and idiosyncrasies. For many Capetonians, America was the entire English-speaking western hemisphere. And any Negroes who seemed to be from the English-speaking western hemisphere were considered ‘American Negroes.’ For this reason, it is quite likely that a number of Canadians were also mistaken for ‘American Negroes’ owing to their fluency in English and regional origin.<sup>59</sup> The logic here is rather sound. It can become quite tricky explaining to

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<sup>57</sup> Those fair-skinned African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were likely to have been identified by their fluent English and North American accents.

<sup>58</sup> Agnes Absalom, personal interview by author, Landsdowne, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>59</sup> In 1875 there were eleven Canadians classified as ‘mixed/other’ and in 1904, at least 9. *Census of the Colony of the Cape Of Good Hope...1875*, Census Tables Part I. Table IX – ‘Birth-places’ Sub-divisions of Groups’. *Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope...1904*, Annexures Part II, Table IX – Birthplaces of People in Detail, including Sub-divisions of Groups’.

someone who is not from the Americas that the region is made up of the countries constituting North America, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean, but that the only country that can be referred to as America is the United States of America.

Many Capetonians also identified Black Americans—and other black foreigners—by their relatively dark skin. A granddaughter of a West Indian remembered that, “dark people stuck together—all foreigners I should say,” she recalled.<sup>60</sup> Cape Town’s black population was dominated by Coloureds, and those who looked too dark to be Coloured or had too many “African” features were often considered to be foreigners if they spoke English fluently. Many Black Americans and West Indians, and probably Canadians too, were often initially confused with Mozambican migrant laborers who were also easily distinguished by their relatively dark skin and foreignness and referred to as “Mozbiekers.”<sup>61</sup> In 1886, a fourteen-year-old girl in Cape Town referred to West Indian Frederick Punter as “a Mozambiquan man.”<sup>62</sup> In the period following the War of 1812, Cape Town blacks often referred to Black American sailors as “sea kafirs” or “kafirs who came from the sea,” seeing the only distinguishing quality between Black Americans and Africans—derogatorily referred to as ‘kafirs’—as their foreign origin.<sup>63</sup>

Not surprisingly, the ‘American Negro’ community in Cape Town included very few ‘American Negroes’ in the sense of the designation used in the Americas at that time, and in the way most likely to have been understood by those in Cape Town’s ‘American Negro’ community. Under this usage, ‘American Negro’ referred to those Negroes from the United States of America. In fact, there were only 189 people in the entire colony that claimed to originate from either North America, America or the United States and were identified by census officers as “mixed/other” in 1904, and of these, only a fraction would have been from the U.S. While what the locals called the “American Negroes” did include Negroes from the West Indies, possibly Canada and even other countries, very few of them were Negroes from the United

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<sup>60</sup> Frances Peters, personal interview by author, Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, 28 February 2003.

<sup>61</sup> For more on Mozambican migrant laborers in Cape Town, see Patrick Harries, “Mozbiekers: The Immigration of an African Community to the Western Cape 1876-1882,” in *Studies in the History of Cape Town*. Vol. 1, edited by Christopher Saunders. Cape Town: History Department, University of Cape Town, 1979.

<sup>62</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith. “Black Ethnicities, Communities and Political Expression in Late Victorian Cape Town.” *Journal of African History* 36, no. 3 (1995): 443-465, 451.

<sup>63</sup> Atkins, “The ‘Black Atlantic Communication Network,’” 24.

States of America. Yet, not only did local Capetonians consider all foreign english-speaking Black people to be ‘American Negroes,’ but many of those ‘American Negroes’ who were not from the United States referred to themselves as ‘American Negroes’.

Gold Coaster and editor of Cape Town periodical *The South African Spectator*, F. Z. S. Peregrino, was at pains to learn why West Indians, who so outnumbered Black Americans in Cape Town and were “good subjects of His Majesty the King,” were “passing for Americans in Cape Town.” He was given two reasons for this. One, “the American Negro being a citizen of a friendly nation is said to enjoy immunity from the operation of certain laws and usages, of which the African black or Colored person is the victim.”<sup>64</sup> This was not a far-fetched belief as many Black Americans also thought they had—or thought they should have had—such rights. In 1898, a white police officer in Natal approached Black American Richard H. Collins who was standing near a bar. When the officer asked Collins what he was doing near the bar, Collins told him to speak English and protested that he was an American citizen and was free to drink as much liquor as he liked. During the skirmish that followed, Collins punched the officer in the nose and grabbed his neck.<sup>65</sup> Closer to home in Cape Town, Black Texan Kid Gardener was beat by an angry white mob in a bar brawl when he refused to leave. “You tryin’ to class me with your Cape Town niggus?” He was said to have asked the bar owner. “I’m from Texas,” he said, “and I ain’t to be tampered with.”<sup>66</sup> West Indians were probably also aware that after 1893, Black Americans in the South African Republic to the north were required to carry U.S. passports which guaranteed them “honorary white” status.<sup>67</sup>

The second reason Peregrino was given for why West Indians called themselves ‘American Negroes,’ was because they, “are entitled, in the event of getting into trouble, to the protection of the American Consul-General.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Black Americans were only granted “honorary white” status in the South African Republic after a Black American man, John Ross, was publicly whipped without trial, by a white policeman for being “impudent.” The American

<sup>64</sup> F. Z. S. Peregrino, “American or West Indian-Which?” *South African Spectator* (Cape Town), 23 August 1902.

<sup>65</sup> Veit Erlmann, “‘A Feeling of Prejudice’: Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers in South Africa, 1890-1898.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (April 1988): 331-350, 331.

<sup>66</sup> Dean, *Umbala*, 85.

<sup>67</sup> This policy was similar to that practiced in the 1970s in apartheid South Africa.

<sup>68</sup> F. Z. S. Peregrino, “American or West Indian-Which?” *South African Spectator* (Cape Town), 23 August 1902.

consular agent in Johannesburg protested that American citizens were to be treated equally before the law, and that Ross' flogging was unacceptable.<sup>69</sup> In Natal, Richard H. Collins, who was eventually arrested, found quick recourse in the American consulate, which was bound by new post-Civil War legislation to protect the rights of Black Americans overseas. Court proceedings concerning the Collins incident were suspended at the insistence of the American consul in Durban.<sup>70</sup> After Kid Gardener was arrested, Black American sailor Harry Dean reckoned that "there was but one chance for the Kid. We must establish that he was American by birth and secure the aid of the American Consul."<sup>71</sup> Indeed there was just reason to believe that U.S. citizenship would provide protection to American citizens when necessary. It was not so reasonable to believe that the same protection would have been extended to West Indians. For a West Indian to believe that he might be able to convince an American consul—whom he would likely assume to be able to distinguish him from a Black American—to advocate on his behalf is dubious.<sup>72</sup> Though there is no reason to believe that West Indians did not, in fact, win representation from U.S. consuls, it would be unreasonable to think that it was so common an affair that large numbers of West Indians masqueraded as citizens of the U.S. If this ever was the case, Peregrino surely betrayed the charade. And though an English-speaking West Indian would have had no trouble convincing a white bar-owner of his U.S. citizenship, whether this would have gained him entry or respect is equally unlikely. Richard Collins, Kid Gardener, and John Ross would testify to this. Of course, there may very well have been some West Indians who, being from small islands, thought it fashionable to reinvent themselves as U.S. citizens. These, however, were likely to have been the minority.

This begs the question, if black West Indians could gain little from calling themselves 'American Negroes,' why would they? It is most likely that black West Indians identified

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<sup>69</sup> Keto, "Black Americans and South Africa, 1890-1910," 386-387; For more on African-Americans at the center of South African-American diplomacy see Robert Trent Vinson, "African-Americans in South African-American Diplomacy: A Case Study in Race and Citizenship Debates, 1895-1925." Paper presented at the Department of History and Institute for Historical Research, University of Western Cape, South African and Contemporary History Seminar, May .

<sup>70</sup> Erlmann, "'A Feeling of Prejudice,'" 331.

<sup>71</sup> Dean, *Umbala*, 86.

<sup>72</sup> Regardless of the outcome, the 1899 application for a U.S. passport by Jamaican David Titius Phillips who worked in the Transvaal was well worth the try as the South African War was looming. Phillips did, however, state that he was a Jamaican. De Waal, "American Black Residents and Visitors in the S. A. R. Before 1899," 53.

themselves as “American Negroes” simply because it was the only point of reference understood by locals. In October 1920, Reverend Kenneth Egerton Moseley Spooner a Pentecostal Holiness missionary from Barbados was reported to have told members of the Transvaal Native Congress that he was an African born in America.<sup>73</sup> Surely, one cannot assume that Rev. Spooner was ashamed of his home in Barbados or that he was guarding his true nationality should he ever need to call upon the U.S. consulate. In stating that he was born in America, he was actually being rather truthful in the sense that people from outside of the Americas would understand.

Nevertheless, among each other, West Indians and Black Americans clearly would have distinguished between themselves even if both groups were accepting of the term, ‘American Negro.’ That West Indians—from various islands—and Americans identified with each other despite the myriad of differences they would have perceived between each other, however, is most fascinating. The closeness of West Indians and Black Americans in Cape Town at the turn of the century was contrary to previous encounters between the two groups, which were often tense and hostile. In Harlem, destination of thousands of mostly British West Indians beginning in 1865 and peaking in the 1920s, Black Americans were openly spiteful towards Afro-Caribbeans. Black Harlemites considered the Black immigrants to be industrious, but greedy, calling them “the Jews of the race.” They ridiculed the immigrants’ clothing and appearance, calling them “king Mon,” “monkey chaser,” “ringtale,” and “cockney.” The two groups also had key differences in lifestyles, which laid the basis for stereotypes and misunderstanding. Even among themselves, Afro-Caribbeans tended to associate only with those West Indians from their particular island. Thus, the fraternal and benevolent organizations they formed in Harlem were exclusive—not for West Indians in general, but for particular islands.<sup>74</sup>

In Cape Town, these differences were overshadowed by those aspects of their identities that Black Americans and West Indians had in common. Not only did local Capetonians not distinguish between the two groups, but Afro-Caribbeans and Black Americans were better able to identify their commonalities when placed in an environment where they both felt like outsiders. Their foreignness to Cape Town amplified those similarities that would have been smothered in hostility on the streets of Harlem. As black and mostly English-speaking, Christian

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<sup>73</sup> Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 365.

<sup>74</sup> Osofsky, Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of A Ghetto*. 2d ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 132, 134.

immigrants from the same region of the world, they united as ‘American Negroes’ or as Negroes from the Americas. This ‘American Negro’ identity was built around a common foreign or ‘American’ cultural heritage, a common racial identity that stemmed from their western origin, and a belief in black racial uplift and self-determination that was fairly new among Cape Town blacks at the time. West Indians and Americans identified with this community through their membership in the same fraternal and benevolent organizations and the establishment of the West Indian and American Association. Unlike in Harlem, where Black Americans and West Indians kept their distance from each other, in Cape Town Black Americans and West Indians were known to worship together at the same church—Bethel A.M.E. West Indians and Americans also united in their support of political organizations that advanced the positions of black Capetonians such as the African Peoples Organization, the Industrial Commercial Workers Union, and the United Negro Improvement Association. They also established their own organizations such as the West Indian and American Association.

#### ‘American’ Cultural Heritage

Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans were both acutely aware of their foreignness in Cape Town. Their sense of difference, however, should not be mistaken for discomfort about being foreign. Quite the contrary, the ‘American Negroes’ of Cape Town were proud of the cultural background they brought from the Americas. Not intent upon assimilating into Cape Town society, the ‘American Negro’ community emphasized those peculiarities that made them ‘American’ and incorporated them into their new lives in Cape Town. African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in the city rallied around each other and accentuated those attributes that they felt expressed their Americanness in their own eyes and in the eyes of local Capetonians.

English was, perhaps, the most significant marker of ‘American Negroes’ and most of the West Indians and Americans in Cape Town were determined to maintain it. Most flatly refused to speak any language other than English. William Walker, from either Barbados or Jamaica, often complained that none of his children could speak English. Walker’s son remembers never being able to understand his father because he would only speak English.<sup>75</sup> The granddaughter

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<sup>75</sup> Edward William Walker, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.

of H.W. Jones fondly remembers him teaching her English.<sup>76</sup> Robert Gonsalves could understand Afrikaans, but did not speak the language.<sup>77</sup> Jamaican Amos Absalom and Barbadian E. Charles spoke a bit of Afrikaans.<sup>78</sup> The son of Barbadian Joseph Orderson said his father only spoke English and that “not one of them tried to learn Afrikaans,” but they, “used American slang.”<sup>79</sup> West Indian Emmanuel Johnson did, however, speak Afrikaans, but he appears to be the exception.<sup>80</sup> Bethel A.M.E., which was largely attended by Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds, also used English as a medium. All of the church’s official board meeting minutes, official progress reports from the various church committees, budgets, and letters of appreciation were all written in English and until 1900 all of the services were also in English.<sup>81</sup>

English was clearly a bit of western culture, that black immigrants were not willing to abandon. Not only did most of the Afro-Caribbean and all of the African-American newcomers speak English as a first language, but local Capetonians identified blacks who spoke the language fluently as ‘American Negroes.’ Thus, by preserving the language and refusing to speak Afrikaans or isiXhosa, these immigrants asserted their foreign identities within Cape Town society and rallied around a common english-speaking ‘American’ heritage. English provided the ‘American Negro’ community with a sense of unity, while distinguishing it as ‘American’ in the eyes of locals.

Perhaps the most fascinating example of Afro-Caribbeans maintaining and asserting their ‘Americanness’ in Cape Town was Robert Gonsalves and his popular coon troupe the ‘Americans’ or the ‘Atjas,’ influenced by Caribbean carnivals. Gonsalves founded the American Sporting Club in 1908, six years after arriving in the city. Members of the Club paid an annual fee and provided their own costumes. The club did not actually participate in the coon competition, but did parade through the streets during the festivities. The ‘Americans’ grew to

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<sup>76</sup> Hilda Phillips, phone interview by author, 5 March 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Florence Sauls. Personal interview by author. Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Agnes Absalom, Personal interview by author. Claremont, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Derra Orderson. Personal interview by author. Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, 27 March 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans,” 25.

<sup>81</sup> It is understandable that Bethel A.M.E. kept its records in English for the benefit of the mother church in the U.S. English sermons, however, were a more contentious issue.



have a membership of 100 by 1938 and featured dancers who dressed in “costumes representing the Red Indians of America.” Denis-Constant Martin notes that ‘Indians’ and ‘Fancy Indians’ are popular masks in carnivals in the Caribbean and New Orleans and that the stilted masqueraders in the ‘Atjas’ looked like those seen in Caribbean carnivals.<sup>82</sup> The Atjas also featured a devil character that pulled another man by a chain.<sup>83</sup> Devils are also prominent in Caribbean carnivals. The ‘Atjas’ were an interesting example of how English-speaking black immigrants asserted their ‘Americanness’ through their cultural contributions, which were strongly evocative of ‘America’ and the United States. In choosing to introduce ‘Indians’ to Cape Town’s New Year’s festivities Robert Gonsalves made a conscious decision to not only maintain his West Indian heritage, but to assert his ‘Americanness.’

Until 1938, the American Sporting Club was believed to be “the only one of its kind in South Africa,” suggesting that the Club was distinguished from the other coon troupes by its ‘Americanness.’ And though the brand of performance used by the ‘Atjas’ was more likely to have been a carry-over from the Caribbean, it was perceived as being from the United States or inspired by the United States because of the use of the loaded term ‘American’ and also because ‘Indians’ seem to be an international symbol for the United States.<sup>84</sup> Though Gonsalves told a *Cape Standard* reporter in 1938 that he was born in Antigua, local Capetonians were unlikely to have distinguished Antigua from ‘America’ and ‘America’ from the U.S. Indeed, Gonsalves may have encouraged this when he told the reporter: “I saw the Indians when I was in America and this gave me the idea.” By referring to America, Gonsalves immediately evoked the United States, though he was performing a largely Caribbean cultural form. Gonsalves’ statement sounds as though he was inspired to form the troupe because of the Native Americans he saw in the United States. Indeed, the *Cape Standard* reporter seems to have come away with just this impression. “The rhythmic beating of drums,” the reporter wrote, “drew my attention to the group of Indian braves executing a war dance under the light of a street lamp. Their hideous, painted masks leered evilly in the light, while the flashing tomahawks and the ringing whoops

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<sup>82</sup> “Coon Season Ends: The Good Samaritan ‘Americans,’” *The Cape Standard*, 15 February 1938. <sup>82</sup> Denis-Constant Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999), 94.

<sup>83</sup> Florence Sauls, personal interview by author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003.

<sup>84</sup> One need only think of the popularity of Spur restaurants in South Africa to realize how symbolic the ‘Indian’ is of the U.S. and its cowboy days.

made the scene realistic. For a moment I was transported to the plains of Wyoming, where a band of whooping Siouxes[sic]—those colourful fighters—rode madly in vast circles trying to cut off a hard pressed group of cattlemen...On my way home I could not help imagining a few scalps hanging from the waist of one of those big fellows wearing a grinning mask.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, by practicing their own Caribbean cultures, West Indians emphasized their foreignness as ‘Americans’ in Cape Town.

It is not surprising that, in an effort to assert their foreign western identity in Cape Town, Afro-Caribbeans often appropriated U.S. culture as their own or evoked U.S. culture because it alone was immediately identifiable as American. After a bitter disagreement with Robert Gonsalves, Donald Bryant—West Indian, longtime friend of Robert Gonsalves, probable member of the American Sporting Club, and the godfather of Gonsalves’ children—started his own coon troupe called the ‘Red Indians.’ Gonsalves’ daughter remembers the ‘Red Indians’ parading horses draped with U.S. flags down the streets during the New Year festivities.<sup>86</sup> The U.S. flag and the obvious reference to Native Americans in the United States may very well have been borrowed from Caribbean carnivals which surely incorporated aspects of U.S. popular culture, but by choosing to introduce this particular carnival theme, Bryant and Gonsalves were asserting their ‘Americanness’ in Cape Town.

Likewise, black West Indians and black Americans who celebrated U.S. holidays in Cape Town were holding fast to a U.S. or ‘American’ identity. The daughter of a Jamaican immigrant remembered that all members of the West Indian and American Association celebrated American Independence from Britain on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with a small party among themselves even though most of them were West Indians.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the *South African Spectator* reported on a celebration of American Independence that took place in 1901.<sup>88</sup> Mr. Henry Ferley, a ships cook who claimed to have been from New York, celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July by raising a U.S. flag on a pole in front of his home.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “Coon Season Ends: The Good Samaritan ‘Americans,’” *The Cape Standard*, 15 February 1938.

<sup>86</sup> Florence Sauls, personal interview by author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003; Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Agnes Absalom, Personal interview by author. Claremont, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>88</sup> “Celebrating the Fourth,” *South African Spectator*, 18 July 1901.

## Race Consciousness and Racial Uplift

The union of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town presupposes a shared racial consciousness, which was crucial in allowing the two groups to identify with each other regardless of their different nationalities. It is without saying that it would have been unlikely that a similar kind of camaraderie would have come about between, say, African-Americans and White Americans in Cape Town. Indeed, the 'American Negro' community was united first by a common—at least, commonly perceived—racial identity. And with this racial identity came an awareness of those issues, which affected the 'race.' Coming from the Americas with its history of race-based subjugation, and often having endured unchecked racism onboard ships, many West Indians and Americans were relatively politicized and concerned with uplifting the black race. The daughter of a Jamaican immigrant remembered being told that all of the members of the West Indian and American Association had photos of Booker T. Washington and the daughter of an immigrant from Montserrat remembers her father having a copy of Washington's *Up From Slavery*.<sup>90</sup>

Many Black Americans and West Indians were considered rather radical by Cape Town standards. In addition to the natural race consciousness fostered by life in the Americas, many of these newcomers had been further politicized as sailors or passengers on ships. Upon reaching Cape Town, Jamaican Amos Absalom was said to have been "dishonorably discharged" after he threw a White man overboard to his death for calling him a "nigger."<sup>91</sup> Timothy Robertson "jumped ship" and remained in Cape Town because of the degree of racial oppression on the sea.<sup>92</sup>

As black people who did not readily fit into the categories of South African society, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans brought with them a racial consciousness and belief in black

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<sup>89</sup> Ferley was fondly remembered as an avid storyteller and often spoke of his childhood and life as a ship's cook. He could also 'play the bones' with both hands while singing, and was said to be fond of tobacco. Noel J. G. Devries, personal interview by author, Kensington, Cape Town, 3 April 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Agnes Absalom, personal interview by author, Landsdowne, Cape Town, 17 March 2003; Kathryn Williams, phone interview by author, 28 February 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Absalom, Agnes Absalom, phone interview by author, 7 March 2003. This account of Absalom's arrival is something of a family myth, and though it may be partially true, the complete story is unknown.

<sup>92</sup> Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans," 8.

racial uplift that was either a constant source of inspiration or consternation for local Capetonians. For many white South Africans, Black Americans and West Indians were agitators who created tension between whites and blacks. Black Americans and West Indians were not strangers to actively promoting the race, and were not hindered by being in a foreign country. In many cases, like that of the Black American man brought before the Durban magistrate for telling a black woman that it was illegal for her to be a slave, Black Americans actively sought ways of improving the lot of Black South Africans. In the early 1890s a small group of Black Americans, Africans, and probably at least one West Indian living in Port Elizabeth formed the African and American Working Men's Union (AAWMU), which provided management training for blacks interested in owning businesses. Through such a venture, the AAWMU hoped to promote black unity and uplift, and create jobs for Black Americans, West Indians and Africans in the area.<sup>93</sup> In so doing, the AAWMU also fostered a sense of community among African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Xhosa living in Port Elizabeth.

In 1873 prominent Cape Town physician Dr. Andrew Christopher Jackson, the son of an African-American, submitted to the Cape House of Assembly a petition along with 121 others opposing a resolution by the Albany Liquor Licensing Board in the Eastern Cape to prohibit Coloureds from buying liquor on Sundays. Dr. Jackson and the other signers of the petition were praised in the *Cape Argus* for doing, "themselves infinite honour in chivalrously placing themselves by the side of their brethren in the East, and protesting on their behalf against an insult offered to the coloured race."<sup>94</sup>

In 1902 Bethel A.M.E. member and Coloured Capetonian W. Collins suggested that the church establish a 'penny bank.'<sup>95</sup> Collins' suggestion was probably the inspiration for African-American Mattie Bell Gow, F.M. Gow's second wife after Sarah Gow died, to begin a penny bank in her home in the 1930s for coloured people who were not making enough money to make deposits in a real bank. People lined up along the sidewalk and onto the long porch around the Gow home where Mattie Belle collected their money through a window for depositing in the

<sup>93</sup>For more information on the AAWMU see Joyce F. Kirk, *Making a Voice: African Resistance to Segregation in South Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 127-159, 127. For a partial list of AAWMU founding members, see page 145.

<sup>94</sup> *Cape Argus*, 17 May 1873; *Cape Argus*, 20 May 1873. Many thanks to Dr. Robert Edgar for bringing these articles to my attention.

<sup>95</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting Minutes, 27 March 1902, Bethel Archives.

‘penny bank.’<sup>96</sup> The Pick-wick Cooperative Club was another organization used by West Indian and Americans and others in the Cape Town community to lighten financial burdens and spread wealth.<sup>97</sup>

### Bethel A.M.E.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was the ideal home for Cape Town’s racially conscious ‘American Negro’ community. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in a spirit of racial equality and black self-determination, which appealed to incoming West Indians and Black Americans who were eager to build comfortable and prosperous lives for themselves in Cape Town. In 1792, free blacks Richard Allen and Absalom Jones staged a walk-out of St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, after being told that they, as African-Americans, had to sit in the back pews of the church. In 1816 Allen and Jones founded the first African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), Bethel A.M.E., which became a center of debate for issues affecting African-Americans.

The brainchild of emigrationist A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, Cape Town’s Bethel A.M.E. was founded in much the same spirit of black racial consciousness and self-help. More so than the nearby Coloured Baptist Church, the A.M.E. church symbolized black uplift and progress and became a home of Cape Town’s ‘American Negro’ community. Adventurous seaman Harry Dean was transporting Mpondo migrant laborers between Port Johns, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town when African-American A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin asked him to be a missionary to the Pondo chief Sigcau. Dean replied that he was “inclined more toward Buddhism,” which disappointed Bishop Coppin. Coppin replied, “Yet if the opportunity offered you would you sacrifice much for your race?” In a testament to the church’s symbolism as a tool for racial uplift, Dean, who dreamt of founding an Ethiopian empire in Africa, agreed to minister to Sigcau<sup>98</sup>

Most West Indians and Americans who settled in Cape Town eventually made their way to the doors of Bethel A.M.E. because of its familiarity as an ‘American’ church and because it

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<sup>96</sup> Frances Hermine Williams, personal interview by author, Richmond, U.S.A, 9 January 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans,” 32.

<sup>98</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 200. Dean, *Umbala*, 141.

represented black hope and progress.<sup>99</sup> Ironically enough, a difference in religious worship was one of the major issues that divided African-Americans and West Indians in Harlem. In Harlem, most African-Americans were Baptists and Methodists who participated in relatively emotional services. The West Indian immigrants, however, were Episcopalian and Catholic and held quiet, subdued services.<sup>100</sup> Though some Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town such as St. Thomas-born Arthur Emile Watlington who attended Nile St. Catholic Church and Jamaican Amos Absalom who said he was Jewish, did not attend Bethel A.M.E., most did. In Cape Town, the religious differences between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were often swept aside in favor of their commonalities. Richmond, Virginia-native Thomas Scott who arrived in Cape Town as a sailor shortly after WWI, became a member of Bethel A.M.E. Scott's son is now a minister and editor of Bethel's weekly newsletter.<sup>101</sup> Barbadian E. Charles who was not a churchgoer attended Bethel when services were held in honor of West Indians and Americans.<sup>102</sup> At least two of James Lyner's children were baptized in Bethel A.M.E. as were at least three of Robert Gonsalves' children.<sup>103</sup> When West Indian James Lyner's wife, Katherine, died, Bethel A.M.E. members sang the hymn "Abide with Me," at an official board meeting in her honor.<sup>104</sup> Mr. Odum or "Yank," as he was known was a Barbadian member of Bethel A.M.E.<sup>105</sup> H.W. Jones from Jamaica, James Allen King from Barbados, and Alfred William Payne from Montserrat were all members of Bethel A.M.E. Even immigrants who joined Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association to which A.M.E. Pastor Frances M. Gow was strongly opposed, were members of Bethel A.M.E.

#### 'American Negro' Organizations

<sup>99</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Osofsky, *Harlem*, 134.

<sup>101</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Agnes Absalom, personal interview by author, Landsdowne, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>103</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Baptismal Register, 1916-1944.

<sup>104</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting Minutes, 6 January 1937.

<sup>105</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans in Cape Town established several organizations that were not so overtly political and concerned with racial uplift as they were in providing a space for 'American Negro' camaraderie. These organizations, however, were sometimes used to encourage community solidarity and action. Perhaps the most active and representative organization of the 'American Negro' community in Cape Town was the West Indian and American Association. According to Robert T. Vinson, the Association was a mutual aid society. Its constitution stated that the organization aimed to, "foster a close and binding relationship among its members," and to promote, "a spirit of true fellowship, to render assistance at all times when necessary and to safeguard the rights and privileges of its members." In order to join the Association, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans had to pay one shilling, and monthly payments of two shillings. If a member missed payment for three consecutive months or was found guilty of "misconduct" he was dismissed from the group.<sup>106</sup> It appears that J. Daniel, or 'Yellow Dan' as members of the Association knew him, may have fallen into the organization's disgraces when he distanced himself from the members and used his fair complexion to win shipbuilding jobs on the docks.<sup>107</sup>

A number of children of West Indians and Americans have fond memories of the West Indian and American Association, which held events for immigrants and their families. Robert Gonsalves' daughter remembers the Association hosting a picnic for families every Easter. The families awoke early on Easter morning to travel by train to Houwhoek where they would build a fire, make coffee, and cook food. Another daughter remembered the Association sponsoring family dances.<sup>108</sup> The son of Thomas Scott remembers the Association hosting a family picnic at Keurboom Park in Newlands.<sup>109</sup> Aside from family events, the Association also had secret meetings where the members were known to drink brandy or rum and eat.<sup>110</sup> The Association appears to have rotated its meeting place among the houses of its members.

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<sup>106</sup> Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans," 34-35. See note 139.

<sup>107</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

<sup>108</sup> Kathryn Williams, phone interview by author, 28 February 2003; Sauls, Florence, personal interview by author. Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

<sup>110</sup> Florence Sauls, personal interview by author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003.

The Afro-Caribbean immigrants appear to have also been members of an organization calling itself the Society of West Indiamen. Pastor F.M. Gow of Bethel A.M.E. announced a request on behalf of the Society for permission to give a concert in Bethel Hall “for the relief of sufferers in connection with the recent catastrophe in the West Indies (particularly the kindred in St. Vincent).” The board resolved to grant the Society free use of the hall.<sup>111</sup>

Many West Indians and Black Americans were members of the Order of Free Gardeners (Africa), which seceded from the Order of Free Gardeners (Scotland) in 1924 after the largely Coloured St. David’s Lodge lost seniority to a predominantly white lodge that was reinstated after severing ties with the order in a disgraceful manner. Taking umbrage to this, St. David’s lodge split from the Scottish Order and formed the Order of Free Gardeners (Africa).<sup>112</sup> West Indians and Americans were probably members of the Order of Free Gardeners (Africa) well before it split with the Scottish Order as evidenced by the special collection taken from Bethel A.M.E.’s congregation in 1905 for the Free Gardeners.<sup>113</sup> What role, if any, West Indians and African Americans played in St. David’s Lodge leaving the Scottish Order is unknown. The Order of Free Gardeners (Africa) had an “Education Fund,” which it used to support “promising young Coloured scholars” under the age of fifteen with “free school fees and books not exceeding an amount of £16 per annum, and tenable for a period of two years.”<sup>114</sup>

The Ethiopian Lodge, the first black lodge of Freemasons established in South Africa, was another fraternal order that included several West Indians and Americans. Begun by African-American A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin in Cape Town’s sixth district,<sup>115</sup> the Ethiopian Lodge belonged to the all-black Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania of which Coppin was a member.<sup>116</sup> The Prince Hall Lodge had its roots in a lodge that was formed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>111</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting Minutes, 5 June 1902, Bethel Archives.

<sup>112</sup> Noel J.G. de Vries, “The History of the Secession of St. David’s Lodge from the Order of Free Gardeners (Scotland and the Founding of the Order of Free Gardeners(Africa).” It is unclear what role, if any, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans played in the secession of St. David’s Lodge from the Scottish Order.

<sup>113</sup> Record of Income and Expenditure of Bethel A.M.E., 29 January 1905, Bethel Archives.

<sup>114</sup> Special thanks to Robert Vinson for generously providing me with citations for the Free Gardeners (Africa). “Free Gardeners’ Education Fund: Bursary Awards for 1936,” *The Sun*, 1 November 1935; “Free Gardeners Education Fund: Bursary Competition,” *The Cape Standard*, 12 November 1940.

<sup>115</sup> Cape Town’s sixth district came to be known as District Six.



during the American War for Independence by Irish mercenaries who were fighting for the British. In 1775, this lodge inducted fifteen black men. When the war ended, Prince Hall, one of the fifteen black members and a Barbadian freeman, was granted a charter from the Grand Lodge of England to establish the African Lodge in Boston. Due to shipping delays, the African Lodge ran into difficulty paying its annual dues, and lost its charter. In 1815, however, the African Lodge of Boston organized the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, which became known as the Prince Hall Lodge. The Ethiopian Lodge paid a monthly fee to Bethel A.M.E. in order to use its building for Lodge meetings.<sup>117</sup>

### A Prosperous Community

In a remarkable take on what life must have been like for Black Americans and West Indians before disembarking in the city, the son of Barbadian immigrant Joseph Orderson exclaimed, “Must be hell on that side [the Americas]! They all jumped the boat!”<sup>118</sup> Having established their own social networks, the West Indian and American community generally did rather well in Cape Town, leading comfortable lives that would have been denied them in the West. True to the hopes of black emigration proponents in the U.S. and the West Indies, Africa did seem to offer an alternative lifestyle to Black Americans and West Indians in Cape Town that was unavailable for most Blacks in the Americas. Andrew Jackson, who immigrated to Cape Town from Richmond, Virginia before the U.S. Civil War, married and had two sons in the city. Jackson purchased several houses—three on Buitenkant street and owned property on Plein and Upper Harrington streets.<sup>119</sup> One of his sons, Andrew Christian Jackson, was educated in Edinburgh and London and became a medical doctor.<sup>120</sup> Dr. Jackson, unlike the sons of most

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<sup>116</sup> “Masonic Notes,” *South African Spectator*, 7 December 1901; “The First Colored Lodge of Freemasons in South Africa,” *South African Spectator*, 29 December 1901.

<sup>117</sup> Cooper, A. A. *The Freemasons of South Africa*. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1986, 207-208; Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting, 18 September 1903, Bethel Archives.

<sup>118</sup> Derra Orderson. Personal interview by author. Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, 27 March 2003.

<sup>119</sup> “Amended Liquidation and Distribution Account in the Estate of the Late Andrew Jackson of Cape Town, Showing the Disposal of Immoveable Property,” South Africa State Archives, Cape Town Repository, MOOC 13/1/529.

Black American men living in the southern United States at that time, became a prominent member within his community, and was the only black doctor in Cape Town.<sup>121</sup> The Cape Argus commented that there, “was not an abler surgeon in the Colony” than Dr. Jackson.<sup>122</sup> In 1889, a fellow guest in a Johannesburg hotel described Dr. Jackson as “a professional man of colour,” who had an English wife and “the finest practice in Cape Town.”<sup>123</sup> Dr. Jackson was so well-established that when his dog, Shot, disappeared, he had the time and money to offer a reward for his return that appeared on the cover of the *Cape Times*. The article warned that, “any person harbouring him after this notice will be legally dealt with.”<sup>124</sup>

Amos Absalom did well enough in Cape Town as an engineer to be able to send money to his brother in the United States who was studying to become a dentist. Absalom was also charitable with his money, aiding many who were impoverished. Barbadian and West Indian and American Association member E. Charles married a woman from St. Helena and bought a farm in Vasco where he owned a number of animals. He and his wife had a large home, which they shared with their adopted son. Amos Absalom and his family often visited the Charles family and his daughter, Agnes, fondly remembers playing tennis at “Uncle Charles” farm on the weekends.<sup>125</sup> Arturo Emile Watlington, born in St. Vincent, Danish West Indies, became a Cape Town postman. He was also remembered as owning a shop where he sold the *Chicago Defender*.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Dr. Robert Edgar brought my attention to Vivian Bickford-Smith’s brief comments about Dr. Jackson in *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, 86. Bickford-Smith, however, states that Dr. Jackson was “probably a West Indian.”

<sup>121</sup> Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*,” 32.

<sup>122</sup> *Cape Argus*, 20 May 1873.

<sup>123</sup> J. Finch, *To South Africa and Back* (London:1890), 120, cited in E. De Waal, “American Black Residents and Visitors in the S. A. R. Before 1899,” *South African Historical Journal* 6 (1974), 54. Dr. Jackson’s marriage to an Englishwoman may explain why there appears to be no Death Notice on record for him. He may have died in England.

<sup>124</sup> *Cape Times*, 1 February 1877.

<sup>125</sup> Agnes Absalom, personal interview by author, Landsdowne, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>126</sup> His granddaughter claims that she and other family members have discovered that Watlington was the first black postman in Cape Town. Patience Watlington, phone interview by author, 5 March; Florence Sauls, personal interview by author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003.

Timothy Levi Robertson who may have lived in New York for several years, but was from British Guiana, arrived in Cape Town in 1891. Robertson was an established businessman by 1920, owning a grocery store in Parow, running a farm, and holding several pieces of real estate.<sup>127</sup> The son of African-American Thomas Scott remembered Robertson being a very wealthy man living in an area of Parow where only White people lived at the time. He recalled that Robertson was, “something of a philanthropist” and that Whites were “very fond of him.”<sup>128</sup> Jamaican H.W. Jones owned a cottage in the southern suburb of Newlands.<sup>129</sup> Barbadian Joseph Orderson bought a cottage and café in Salt River.<sup>130</sup> William Walker, from either Barbados or Jamaica, owned property in Maitland and Vasco.<sup>131</sup> It is no surprise that many of the immigrants eagerly bought property once in Cape Town. Bringing traditions of black independence and hopes of a better life with them from the United States and the West Indies, these men and women were eager to do those things which proved difficult or impossible for blacks to do in their home countries. Owning land was the first step in achieving this dream.

A granddaughter of F. M. Gow who moved to Richmond Virginia as a child in 1939 recalls missing the life she led growing up in Cape Town, which she considered to be far more advanced than how Black Americans lived in the U.S. at that time. Not only did she miss the mountain and the ocean, but she also missed the modern conveniences she had come to depend upon in Cape Town. In Cape Town her family had an electric stove, electric refrigerator, phone, and electric iron. By contrast, in Richmond, the children she played with thought that she was from a place where “wild animals roamed freely.” She remembered desperately wanting them to understand, “how beautiful Cape Town was, how modern it was.” She remarked, “Richmond had streetcars that kept you up at night. In South Africa we had double-decker buses and at that time [1930s] we could sit anywhere we wanted to on the buses.”<sup>132</sup> A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin, resident in Cape Town from 1900 to 1904, echoed this praise in his *Observations of*

<sup>127</sup> Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans,” 21.

<sup>128</sup> Leslie Scott, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

<sup>129</sup> Hilda Philips, phone interview by author, 5 March 2003.

<sup>130</sup> Derra Orderson, personal interview by author, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, 27 March 2003.

<sup>131</sup> William Walker, personal interview by author, Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.

<sup>132</sup> Frances Hermine Williams, personal interview by author, Richmond, U.S.A, 9 January 2003.

*Persons and Things in South Africa*. “Cape Town is a really modern city,” he wrote, “ Its water supply is from Table Mountain, distributed about the city by three reservoirs. The sanitary improvements are up to date. Electric cars are plentiful, many of them built by the G.J. Brill Co., of Philadelphia, Pa., [sic] Telephone, telegraph and cable facilities are the same as in London or New York. The Equitable Life Insurance Company of New York is building the first ‘sky scraper’ and more are likely to follow soon. The Government Buildings, House of Parliament and Postoffice [sic], are quite imposing.”<sup>133</sup> It was possible, therefore, for Black Americans and West Indians in Cape Town to live worlds better than they would have been able to in the U.S. or the Caribbean islands.

A number of Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans did so well, that they were either able to return to the West Indies for good or were able to visit home. According to Bethel A.M.E. records, Philip and Annie Lewis left for the West Indies in 1904. Records are unclear if the pair left to visit in the West Indies or to stay, but Philip Lewis is noted as having “left” the church in order to go to the West Indies. Another couple J. and Judith Murphy left Cape Town in 1902 only a year after joining the church. Judith Murphy is listed as leaving for the West Indies. A week after Judith Murphy’s departure F.M. Gow announced that “Bro. J. Murphy was leaving for the U.S.” at a Bethel Board Meeting. Elijah Irish of Sea Point “left for home” on the island of St. Vincent in 1914 after being a member of Bethel for ten years.<sup>134</sup> Henry Wilford Jones arranged for passage to Jamaica in 1944.<sup>135</sup>

Life was not always better in Cape Town, though. Several West Indians appealed to the Governor General in Cape Town for assistance to return to the West Indies, but were denied help.<sup>136</sup> And a significant number ran into problems in the city. In 1902, Peregrino reported two cases of West Indians who had found themselves in trouble with the law. In one, five West Indians were sentenced to one year in prison for assault. In the other, a West Indian named

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<sup>133</sup> Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, 22.

<sup>134</sup> It is not clear if Annie Lewis was also an Afro-Caribbean. A resident of Bo-Kaap remembers the Lewis family as being relatively dark-skinned and as living on Pentz and then Capini Street in the Bo-Kaap. Frances Peters, personal interview by author, Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, 28 February 2003; A.M.E. Church Members Roll Book, Comencing [sic] May 1898, Bethel Archives; Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting Minutes, 13 March 1902, Bethel Archives.

<sup>135</sup> Henry Wilford Jones, personal diary, in the possession of Hilda Philips.

<sup>136</sup> Copley, ““Far From Home,”” 356.

Benjamin Price was charged with stealing a piano.<sup>137</sup> In 1877 Charles Conway, reported as being “an American Black” pled guilty to stealing two baskets.<sup>138</sup> And Dr. Jackson’s successful practice was perhaps underscored by his brother’s mediocrity.<sup>139</sup> In 1904 Raymond Wilbert Victor McVicer, believed to be a Black American, shot Henry Sylvester Williams’ clerk, a West Indian named Frank Egerton and a coloured woman, Philda Price, in Williams’ legal offices in Cape Town.<sup>140</sup> A little further out in Carnarvon, James O’Connor Morris, “an American Negro” painter and paper-hanger, was charged with murdering the husband of his lover, Maria Openty. In a dramatic closure to his case, he requested the presence of his lover at the gallows so that he could address her. “Maria! Look in my face! It is your fault that I am here; but you will follow me very soon.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> F. Z. S. Peregrino, “American or West Indian-Which?” *South African Spectator* (Cape Town), 23 August 1902. In his salty fashion, Peregrino noted that even though the papers said the five West Indians were American Negroes, they were not. And after mentioning that Benjamin Price was listed as an American Negro from Boston, he quipped, “He never saw the *Hub*. He is a West Indian.”


<sup>138</sup> “Resident Magistrate’s Court: Tuesday August 26,” *Cape Times*, 29 August 1877.

<sup>139</sup> George Andrew Jackson, a clerk, appeared in the *Cape Times* as “the brother of Dr. Jackson” when he broke his leg after falling from a cart. See, “Local and General,” *Cape Times*, 28 October 1876. The death notice for Andrew Jackson, father of the Jackson brothers, listed G. Jackson’s only credential as being “married.” The Death Notice may have hinted at a family scandal surrounding the married G. Jackson when it first listed G. Jackson as having “no issue” and then as having “no lawful issue.” Death Notice, Andrew Jackson, Cape Town Repository, MOOC 6/9/208. It appears that G. Jackson had an illegitimate son whose mother, Louisa Dublequy, claimed property from Andrew Jackson’s estate after the son’s untimely death at a factory at the age of 16. Interestingly enough, G. Jackson’s son was mentioned in Andrew Jackson’s estate. “Amended Liquidation and Distribution Account in the Estate of the Late Andrew Jackson of Cape Town, Showing the Disposal of Immoveable Property, MOOC 13/1/529. Death Notice, George Reginald Andrew Jackson, Cape Town Repository, MOOC 6/9/319. It is unknown what came of Dublequy’s claim. Dr. Jackson was the co-executor of Andrew Jackson’s estate.

<sup>140</sup> Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams*, 69.

<sup>141</sup> “Circuit Court, Victoria West,” *Cape Times*, 26 April 1877; “Local and General,” *Cape Times*, 10 August 1877.

**CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE.**  
FOR SEAMEN NOT DISCHARGED BEFORE A SUPERINTENDENT.

 LONDON BY ORDER OF THE MARINE SUPERINTENDENT	Name of Ship.	Official Number.	Port of Registry.	Registered Tonnage.	Description of Voyage or Employment.
	<i>H.M. Tug "Scorpion"</i>				<i>By Rule</i>
Name of Seaman.		Place of Birth.		Date of Birth.	
<i>R. Gonsalves</i>		<i>Antigua</i>		<i>1882</i>	
Number of Ticket (if any).	Capacity.	Date of Entry.	Date of Discharge.	Place of Discharge.	
	<i>AB</i>	<i>14/2/02</i>	<i>19/4/02</i>	<i>Simonstown</i>	
I hereby certify that the above particulars are correct, and that the above-named Seaman was discharged accordingly.					
Dated this <i>19<sup>th</sup></i> day of <i>April</i> 190 <i>2</i> .					
(Counter-signed) <i>Robert Gonsalves</i>			Signed <i>Thomas A. Mather</i>		
Witness					
Address of Witness					
Occupation of Witness					
One of these Certificates must be filled up and delivered to every Seaman who is discharged otherwise than before a Superintendent.					

P. 110. 1. (1400) — 1891 — 2000:1-1900

Certificate of Discharge issued to Robert Gonsalves in Simonstown.  
Original certificate in the possession of Gwen Pimm.



Robert Gonsalves and unknown women. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Gwen Pimm.*

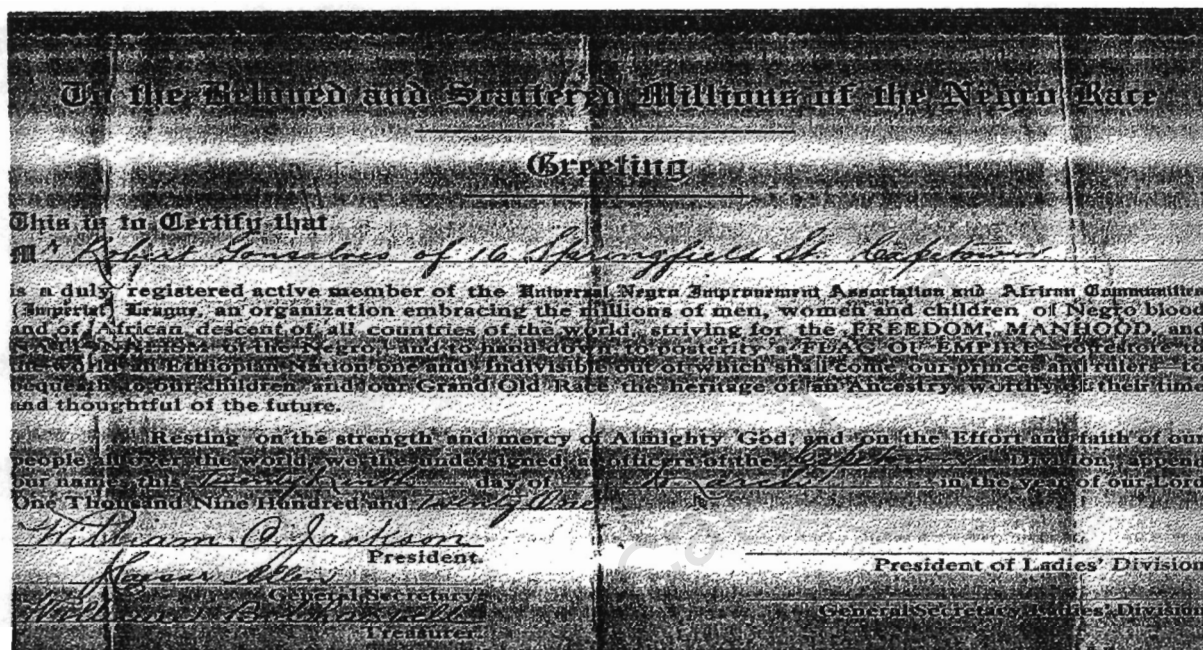


Robert Gonsalves, left, and J. Daniel. Picnic in the Company Gardens. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Gwen Pimm.*





The 'American Indians'. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Gwen Pimm.*

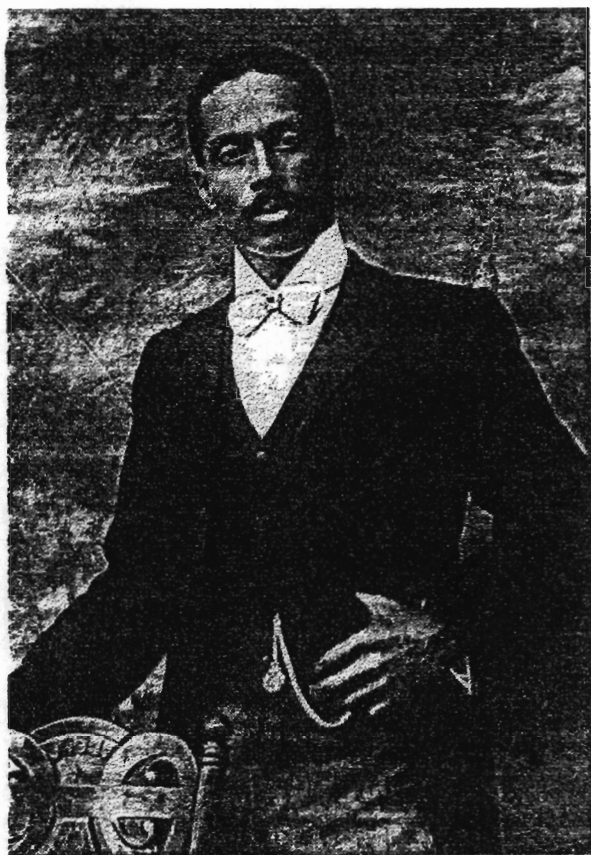


Certificate of Membership in the United Negro Improvement Association held by Robert Gonsalves.

Original certificate in the possession of Gwen Pimm.



James Allen King and his wife Annie. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Florence Slamet.*



Amos Absalom. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Agnes Absalom.*



Frances McDonald Gow. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Donald Kleinsmidt.*



Sarah Elizabeth Gow. First wife of Frances McDonald Gow. Cape Town.  
*Original photo in the possession of Donald Kleinsmidt.*



Grandchildren of F. M. and Sarah Gow.  
*Original photo in the possession of Donald Kleinsmidt.*



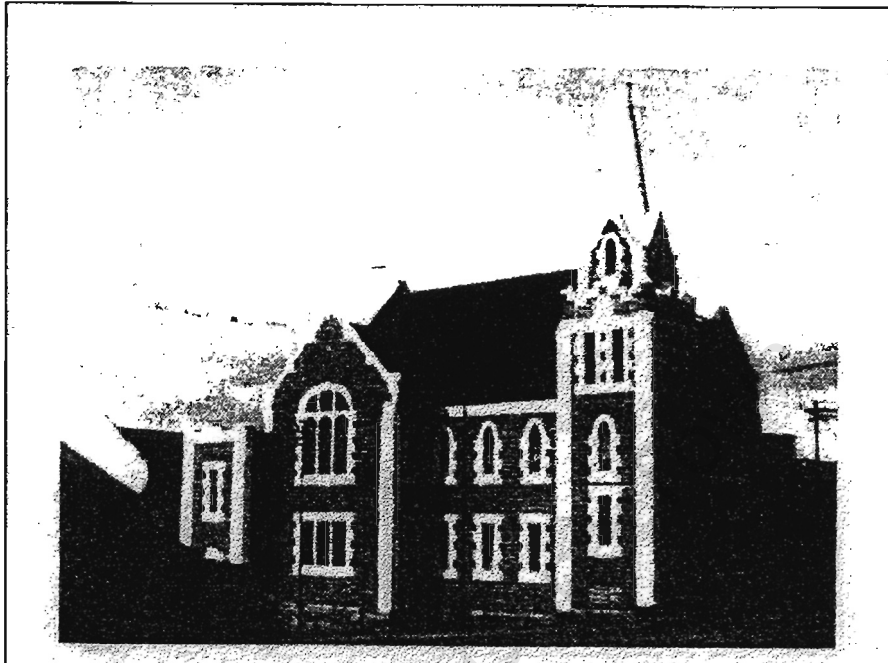


F. M. Gow, seated center, and family.

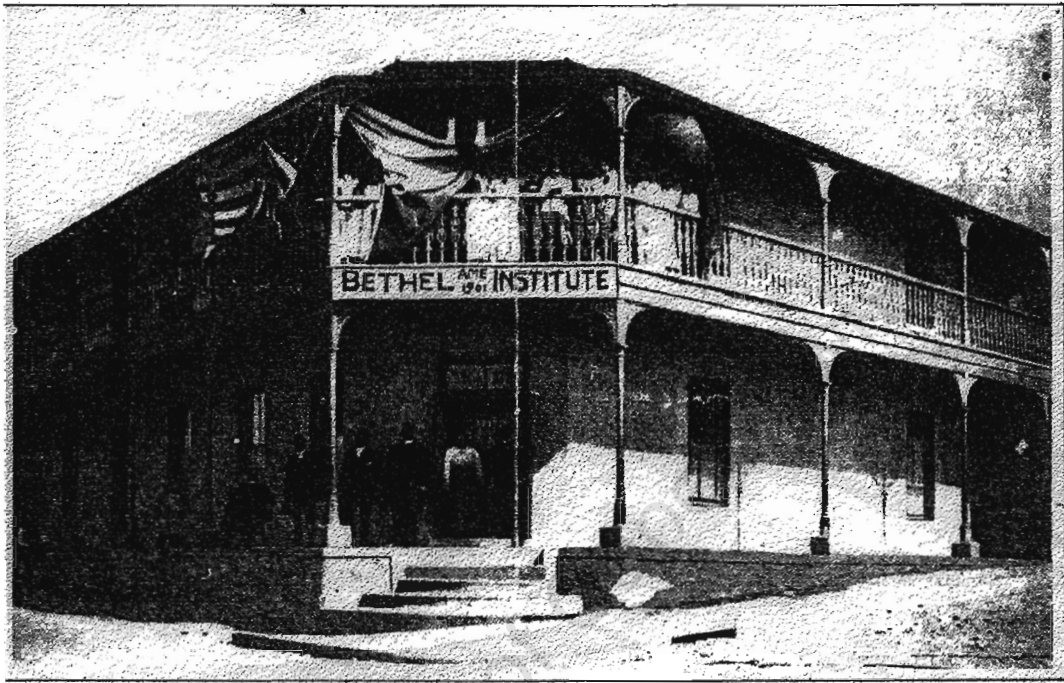
Frances Herman Gow is seated to right of F. M. Gow. F. H. Gow's African-American wife, Louise Beatrix, standing on far right. F. M. Gow's African-American second wife, Mattie Bell, standing in center.

*Original photo in the possession of Donald Kleinsmidt.*

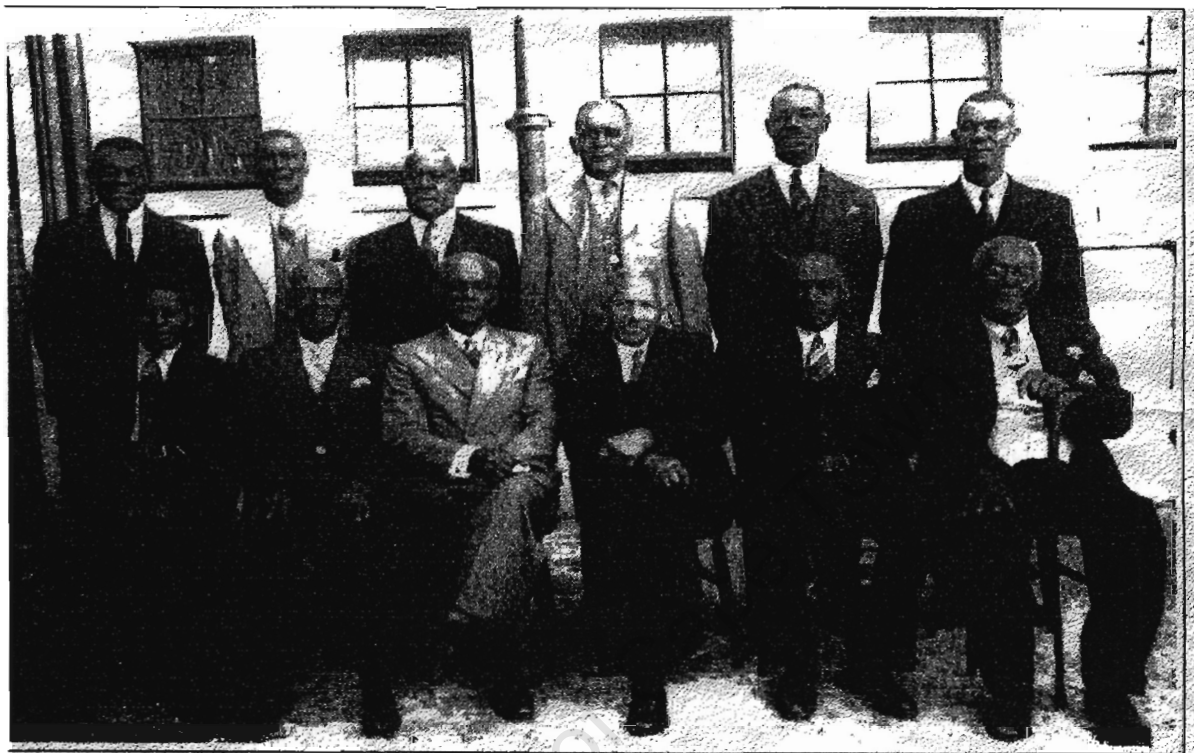




Bethel A. M. E. Church. District Six. Cape Town.  
*Photocopy of original found at The District Six Museum, Cape Town.*



Bethel Institute. District Six. Cape Town.  
*Photocopy of original found at The District Six Museum, Cape Town.*



**Some Members of the West Indian and American Association**

*Standing:* William Walker (Barbados or Jamaica), John Johnson (Jamaica), James Bashley (Virgin Islands), Robert Gonsalves (Antigua), Alfred William Payne (Montserrat), James Allen King (Barbados)

*Sitting:* S. Campbell, J. Caesar Allen, Arturo Emile Watlington (St. Thomas), James Daniel, E Charles, Henry Wilford Jones (Jamaica). Cape Town.

*Photocopy of original found at The District Six Museum, Cape Town.*



Descendants of Cape Town's "American Negro" Community, November 2003, *The District Six Museum*, Cape Town. Families represented: Absalom, Payne, Gonsalves, Watlington, Jones, King, Lyner, Orderson, Bashley, Scott, Walker, Gow, Layne, Warner.  
*Original photo in the possession of author.*

## **Coloured Identity, Black Westerners, and Modernity**

In his seminal study on the Afro-Caribbeans in South Africa until 1930, Alan Gregor Copley remarks that black West Indians living in Cape Town, though “clannish” and often referred to as ‘American Negroes’ by local Capetonians, were highly integrated into the city’s emerging Coloured community,<sup>1</sup> particularly its elite. Likewise, both those African-Americans who settled permanently in the city and those who only remained temporarily came to be identified with Coloureds even though they proudly asserted their American origins. Though the Coloured identity that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was rooted in the particular history and practices of the Cape, its nature as a catch-all category for disparate groups and individuals who were neither European nor Bantu-speaking African made it a suitable home for immigrant ‘American Negroes’. Most importantly, ‘American Negroes’ and Coloureds established a camaraderie based on a shared sense that, in their westernness, they were exceptional and progressive blacks hovering between what they considered to be the polarized African and Western worlds.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the African-American and Afro-Caribbean identities and their emergence within western societies that were dependent upon the black presence, yet reinforced a racial and cultural hierarchy that exalted whiteness and western culture while degrading blackness and African cultures. Though living within such hostile environments, blacks made significant contributions to the material and cultural wealth of the western nations they inhabited, and even forged new hybrid cultural systems that, as Paul Gilroy tells us, were positioned somewhere within the triangle connecting the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Nevertheless, in these societies, where black cultures amalgamated with western cultures under threat of the whip and where blacks were unable to profit from their labor, many black Americans and black West Indians shared the belief that progress could only wear a modern western face. In line with the modernist thinking of the day, many hoped that by fashioning

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<sup>1</sup> Copley, “‘Far From Home,’” 360.

themselves as westerners and distancing themselves from all that was considered African and ‘uncivilized’, they too would advance.

The next section of this chapter touches on one of the key characteristics among groups within Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic”- existence both on the inside and outside of the western world- and its applicability to individuals and groups in Africa who, in different ways, identified more with these new Atlantic cultures than those indigenous to Africa. In this way I introduce Gilroy’s conceptualization of the “Black Atlantic,” which is useful in putting African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-British cultures into their proper context, and has the potential to aid in understanding those black groups who remain in Africa, share the ambivalence toward Africa and the West, and have participated in the trans-Atlantic cultural and intellectual exchange.

Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” correctly identifies a group of interconnected and hybrid black cultures, which are suspended between Africa, Europe and the Americas, but appears to be restricted to just three black groups in the West descended from African slaves. Not only does he ignore South America, but in defining the “Black Atlantic,” he does not address the considerable amount of overlap between this group and others in Africa, such as Coloureds in South Africa’s Cape Province or even individuals such as Charlotte Manye and Henry Msikinya- representing a tiny, westernized African elite- who returned to South Africa from the U.S. in the company of the leader of Bishop Levi J. Coppin’s ‘American Colony’. This section will consider the possibility of broadening the scope of the “Black Atlantic” to consider those groups and individuals in Africa who also occupied the metaphorical black expanse between Africa and the West. Namely, this section will ask: How might the Cape’s Coloured community reside in the “Black Atlantic”?

Finally, the chapter illuminates the complex dialogue between Cape Town’s Coloured elite and ‘American Negroes’. Beginning with a brief history of Coloured identity, I will suggest that the emergence of Coloured identity was a modern phenomenon created by the British colonial government, adopted by Coloured elites, and made possible by the unique history of those later defined as Coloured. The recognition of a separate Coloured identity inserted those so defined into the narrative of an imported, modern western society more typical of those begun by the British in the Americas. In response, the Coloured elite adopted the identity as a rallying point for western-style progress and as a marker distinguishing themselves from supposedly uncivilized Africans. Many Coloured elites identified with ‘American Negroes’ and sought to

negotiate their position in Cape society and to understand their unique history within the foreign context of the 'American Negro' experience in the Americas. In this way, the Coloured elite came to operate within the "Black Atlantic" paradigm. 'American Negroes', on the other hand, looked to the Coloured elite as crucial evidence that Africa could be westernized, and thus, 'civilized' and redeemed.

#### 'American Negroes' and the Social Hierarchies of the Modern West

Descendants of African slaves, 'American Negroes' were initiated into modern western society through a social structure, which placed the highest value on whiteness and westernization and actively sought to suppress African cultural practices, which were considered uncivilized and backward. Even after the abolition of slavery, throughout the Americas, racist group stratification enforced the western assumption that whites were an inherently superior race and that society should be ordered in such a way to reflect this accepted truth. Not surprisingly, these societies bred an obsession with racial purity. Particularly in the U.S. and Barbados, the boundary dividing blacks and mulattoes from whites was exceptionally impenetrable.

Early nineteenth century society in the United States was divided between blacks- free, slave, and mulatto- and whites.<sup>2</sup> U.S. society was unique in that it exhibited what physical anthropologists call "unilateral mixing." That is to say that racial mixing is only apparent in one of the two groups. While the white group appeared to remain the same in the United States, the African slave group was modified because it absorbed biracial offspring. Unlike in the West Indies where mulatto slaves were often freed and served as a buffer between the overwhelmingly large African slave population and the white minority, mulattoes in the U.S. were often treated no differently from other blacks. This was largely because whites outnumbered blacks in the U.S. and a free mulatto buffer class was simply unnecessary. Additionally, those of mixed-race in the United States were usually the illegitimate offspring of low-class whites and black slaves and greatly despised by the white upper class. To have granted extra privileges to such interracial children would only attach worth to the blood of poor whites.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the United States, mulatto was used to identify the children of mixed black-white parentage.

<sup>3</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 105.



African-Americans, therefore, were often racially mixed to varying extents, but their identity as blacks stemmed from their common African descent, not from the fact of some racial mixture. As white ancestry generally made no difference to a black person's identity in the U.S., African-Americans were, in a sense, an altered group of Africans. The fact of racial mixture, particularly after slavery was abolished in 1863, was largely inconsequential. African-Americans, therefore, were socialized in a society where they, regardless of phenotype were treated as inferiors.

This is not to say that mulattoes in the U.S. were never treated better than other slaves. In some cases they were, but this was usually done within the system of slavery. For instance, a mulatto slave might be given work to do in the slave-owner's home while other slaves worked in the fields. In its own subtle way this preference sometimes given mulattoes for the easier slave tasks reinforced the superiority of whiteness. Indeed, slave-owners were intimating that mulatto slaves, who physically approximated whiteness more than other slaves, were more deserving of privilege. Mulatto slaves were also disproportionately represented among free blacks. Though 10.4% of slaves in the South in 1860 were of racially mixed ancestry, 40.8% of the free black population was racially mixed.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, free mulattoes and other free blacks often lived with the constant threat of reenslavement and were often treated no better than slaves. Even in the North, where emancipation came several decades before the Civil War, blacks were in considerable danger of being captured and sent to the South as slaves. And, though free blacks, including free mulattos, endured a personal injury at being prevented entry into mainstream white society, they tended to identify with both free and enslaved blacks. The major divide in U.S. society was not between mulattoes, black freepersons and slaves, but between blacks and whites. It was within such a society where race could trump even one's class, that African-Americans internalized the superiority of whiteness and westernization.

The development of black culture in the United States mimics the story of black unilateral racial mixture, in that it emerged as a new syncretic form, influenced by the dominant white cultures and the cultural legacies of Africa. And, while black cultures did make a lasting impact on the developing U.S. society- namely in the areas of language, music, and agriculture- the uneven nature of the relationship between slave and slave master ensured that black culture

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<sup>4</sup> See Table 1 in Kwando Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the African American Press 1827-1861* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998), 213.



absorbed the brunt of the cultural encounter. Paul Gilroy's work makes great strides in identifying the characteristics of this new hybrid culture created by blacks in the Americas. He makes particular note of the centrality of music to "Black Atlantic" cultural expression, a fact that supplants "the privileged conceptions of both language and writing as preeminent expressions of human consciousness."<sup>5</sup> And, though by the late nineteenth century, most blacks in the U.S. had lived their whole lives in western society and were heirs to a distinct cultural tradition that was no longer wholly African, but in line with a "Black Atlantic" world, they still occupied a tenuous position between the U.S. and Africa. A syncretic culture, which so clearly incorporated African practices, was simply not pure enough in western society.

Though much can be said for the gradual erosion of African languages and cultural practices through the oppression and hybridity caused by slavery in the U.S., there is also something to be said for the deliberate destruction of African heritage by blacks, themselves, who, particularly after emancipation, wanted to hasten their entrance into white society and distance themselves from their 'uncivilized' African past. In the aftermath of the Civil War, leaders within African-American communities were eager to insert themselves

The free black population, with its tenuous position as freepersons not far removed from slavery, was often at the forefront of this movement. In 1860 almost 42% of free blacks resided in the northern states, which had abolished slavery decades before.<sup>6</sup> These free northern blacks, many of them comprising a growing black elite, felt an intimate connection with their enslaved brethren in the South. Indeed, many black northerners had escaped bondage in the South and many more had relatives who remained enslaved. Many blacks in the North, therefore, felt a personal responsibility to prove blacks unworthy of slavery by demonstrating that blacks had progressed beyond Africa and that they were capable of achieving a level of 'civilization' comparable to that of whites.

In no other institution was this concern more expressed than within the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church. As Campbell notes, it "became the chief institution within which black Americans confronted the problem of Africa—an arena for debating the vexed questions of African colonization and emigration, the value of African missions, and the precise nature of

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<sup>5</sup> Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 74.

<sup>6</sup> See Tables 1 and 5 in Kwando Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the African American Press 1827-1861*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998, 213, 215.

African Americans' historical and cultural relationship with their ancestral continent.”<sup>7</sup> Founded by free blacks in Philadelphia under the leadership of former Delaware slave Richard Allen, the A.M.E. church had a vested interest in the abolition of slavery and African-American modernity. Allen, himself, just after being consecrated Bishop of the A.M.E. Church, was arrested by a southern slave owner who claimed that Allen was his slave. Allen was only released when friends vouched for his freedom.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, members of the A.M.E. Church and other free blacks in the North felt an acute need to demonstrate that slavery was an untenable and corrupt institution. In the interests of the slaves in the South and of blacks throughout the nation whose future hinged upon proof that blacks were unworthy of slavery, Allen and other leaders of the church encouraged members to improve upon their habits and customs in order to show themselves deserving of freedom.

A.M.E. members took to joining a variety of fraternal and benevolent organizations that promoted group solidarity and assisted blacks in business and educational endeavors. It was their hope that whites, upon seeing the progress of black northerners, would more readily support abolition in the South. A.M.E. members were also unhesitant in seizing opportunities by which they could win the admiration and respect of whites, such as when Allen agreed to coordinate Philadelphia's response to the yellow fever outbreak of 1793 because physicians thought that blacks were immune to the disease. Not only did Allen contribute a significant amount of his own money to the effort of nursing the sick and burying the dead, but he also led other blacks in the same.<sup>9</sup>

After Allen's death in 1831, a new breed of A.M.E. leaders set about demonstrating the capacity for black progress by stripping African-American spirituality of what distinguished it from that of whites and replacing it with practices that were more “enlightened” and not imbued with that stigma that so haunted African cultural practices- “superstition.” Taking a swipe at the preeminence of music over writing among black Americans, A.M.E. Bishop Daniel Alexander

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<sup>7</sup> James T. Campbell, “Towards a Transnational Comparative History,” paper presented at Beyond White Supremacy: Towards a New Agenda for the Comparative Histories of South Africa and the United States, University of London School of Advanced Study, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1997, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans: From Africa to the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 504; Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 26-27.

Payne derided the African-American preference for spontaneous song selection and the unwillingness to set the lyrics of spirituals to written music. African-Americans, instead, mixed choruses, verses, and tunes to make unique songs that were often passed down orally. Payne also attacked the emotionalism of African-American worship services during which blacks were known to sway, and dance under the influence of “the spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Eventually, dancing, trances, and spirit possession were banned in the church.<sup>11</sup> These efforts to stamp out what was, in effect, a unique syncretism of African and European religious practices intensified after emancipation as the A.M.E. church struggled to convert and assimilate newly freed blacks who, though largely Christianized, had preserved much more of their African heritage.

With the abolition of slavery, A.M.E. ministers flocked to the South to baptize blacks and perform legal marriages. With slavery over, the church was concerned about freed blacks behaving in a way that would lead whites to doubt the virtues of emancipation. A.M.E. ministers made a number of recommendations for the successful integration of freed blacks into the ‘civilization’. Freedpersons were instructed on everything from style of dress, to the virtues of industry and the accumulation of wealth, to chastity. One A.M.E. minister and future bishop asserted that freed blacks should replace their banjos, an African-American adaptation of a West African instrument, with “better instruments” such as the mandolin and piano.<sup>12</sup> Unhappy with the freedpersons behavior during spiritual services, the A.M.E. church moved quickly to impart a sense of formality and restraint to worship. The ecstatic hand-clapping, singing, what Payne called “Voodoo” dancing, and the ring shout, which Campbell calls, “perhaps the most dramatic African survival in North,” were all forced out of the church.<sup>13</sup> As Campbell points out, black separatist institutions, such as the A.M.E. church, were paradoxical in that they laid the foundation for black nationalism while serving as “arenas of assimilation, within which tens of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 39-41.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 61.

thousands of African Americans imbibed the manners and mores of the dominant society,” and asserting “the right of African Americans to share fully in the fruits of American democracy.”<sup>14</sup>

This deliberate effort by the A.M.E. Church to modernize African-Americans was in harmony with the belief of many among the black elite and intellectual class in the U.S. that slavery was an act of God, which, albeit cruelly, introduced blacks to the redeeming effects of western civilization. It remained for blacks in the United States, they believed, to overcome slavery and injustice and to purge themselves of their ‘uncivilized’ African past so as to take their rightful place among the civilized peoples of the world. In line with the principles of Christianity, these African-Americans believed that induction into western civilization would be their reward for centuries of longsuffering. Slavery, they thought, was more a blessing in disguise than an all-out curse. “I do not believe that American slavery was a divine institution,” A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner wrote in 1883, “but I do believe it was a providential institution and that God intends to make it the primal factor in the civilization and Christianization of that dark continent.”<sup>15</sup>

As free black Northerners emphasized the role their behavior played in vindicating blacks in the U.S., black emigrationists stressed the importance of African-Americans ‘civilizing’ Africa for the vindication of blacks the world-over. For those African-Americans who supported black emigration, it was their God-given duty to impart the virtues of western civilization to their lowly and ‘heathen’ brethren in Africa who, though they may have once been the rulers of glorious civilizations, had fallen behind the veil of darkness. As Turner wrote in 1891 in defense of African-American emigration, “Africa will be the thermometer that will determine the status of the Negro the world over... the Negro here will never be anything here while Africa is shrouded in heathen darkness. The elevation of the Negro in this and all other countries is indissolubly connected with the enlightenment of Africa.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, once African-Americans achieved western modernity, they were bound to enlighten the continent of their origin.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>15</sup> Turner, *Respect Black*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., *Respect Black*, 83.

This is not to overlook the effects of the institution of slavery on dampening African cultural practices and obliterating African languages by forbidding slaves to speak their mother tongues, and by preventing them from working with slaves from the same region of Africa. This is also not to ignore the fact that African cultural contributions live on, albeit in new syncretic forms, in the music and language of both blacks and whites in the United States today. Nevertheless, through a social system that placed whites and European cultures at the top of a rigid social hierarchy, Africanisms in African-American culture were consistently attacked and destroyed.

Though group stratification in the Caribbean was different from that in the United States, it had the same effect of enforcing white supremacy and encouraging a break with Africanisms in Caribbean culture. With some variation, British West Indian societies recognized mixed race individuals as the middle group of a three-tiered society with the white class and the dominated African class on either end.<sup>17</sup> In this way there were three major gradations of civilization in the Caribbean making the social structure more complex than that of the black-white division in the U.S., but similar in the value it placed on whiteness and westernization. Furthermore, Caribbean society also had the added dimension of colonialism, which subjugated even white colonial society to the hegemony of the European metropole. And with the high death rates of slaves on what were mainly sugar plantations, there was a constant replenishing of the workforce with slaves from Africa, which caused something of a divide between African slaves and Creole slaves, who were usually Christianized and relatively pacified.<sup>18</sup> Creole slaves were favored over African slaves and were known to taunt African slaves by calling them 'salt water nigger' and 'Guinea-bird'. There was also a class of free blacks who, separate from free Coloureds, were often treated more like slaves.

In most Caribbean colonies, Coloureds were treated as superior to other blacks and were freed and granted almost full citizenship rights. Smaller than the black slave populations, Coloureds generally identified with the white upper class, though they were never able to participate fully in this stratum of Caribbean society. Coloureds distanced themselves from other blacks in order to gain concessions from whites, while whites encouraged Coloureds to

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<sup>17</sup> There were some interracial marriages in the Caribbean, such as the marriage of a black man and white woman in 1685, but such marriages were rare in the Caribbean and occurred to a much lesser extent than they did in the Cape Colony. Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 65-67.

<sup>18</sup> Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 57.

distinguish themselves from other blacks by holding out token rights. One act passed by the Jamaican assembly went so far as to require those Coloureds who did not own at least ten slaves to wear a blue cross on their right shoulder.<sup>19</sup> And Coloureds in Jamaica only supported the emancipation of slavery when their requests for more rights under the government failed.<sup>20</sup> Jamaican society, from which the third largest proportion of the Cape's Afro-Caribbeans originated, recognized a melange of social tiers, and granted rights according to one's position on a race or color spectrum. The closer one was to the African pole, the more ostracized one was from white society. Roughly, though, Jamaican society fell into the three-tier system with blacks at the bottom, browns in the middle, and whites at the top.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear from which strata the majority of Cape Town's Jamaicans originated.

In some instances, however, Caribbean society was more like that of the United States. Barbados, the oldest sugar-producing colony of the British West Indies and origin of the largest portion of Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town, practiced a more intense form of racial stratification than the other West Indian colonies. In Barbados, Coloureds remained on the plantations as slaves because they were largely the offspring of slave women and anonymous white men—as opposed to the slaveowner. Some white planters, however, did free their offspring with slave women, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century Barbados had a small second-class community of Coloureds. In those situations where their white fathers freed Coloureds, their black mothers were almost certain to remain as slaves. To the horror of many slave mothers of Coloured children, free Coloureds often owned slaves and supported the institution with as much zeal as their white fathers. In the slave uprising of 1816, only a small number of freed Coloureds in Barbados sided with the slaves. A much larger number actually fought against the slaves.<sup>22</sup> In Caribbean society, participation as free individuals in white society, was the highest pinnacle of achievement. It was so coveted that those who were favored by the white class for their light skin were willing to fight the sons of their mothers to earn and maintain empty privileges.

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<sup>19</sup> Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Oxford: Clío Press, 1981), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Parry, J. H. and P. M. Sherlock. *A Short History of the West Indies* (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1966), 185.

<sup>21</sup> Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 67-68.

In response to white supremacy, Afro-Caribbeans both assimilated to western society and submerged some elements of their culture that were considered 'uncivilized', such as obeah, underground, creating unique syncretic cultures.<sup>23</sup> Afro-Caribbean intellectuals responded by propagating many of the same beliefs about 'civilization', Africa, and blacks that were advocated by African-American thinkers. Tasked, as they felt, with the duty of proving that Afro-Caribbeans were not inferior as Caribbean social structure suggested, black thinkers posited that Africa held in its bosom the remnants of civilizations that were far greater than their European contemporaries. As Afro-Caribbeans, they believed that they were the heirs of Africa's past glory. And though they agreed that Africa had fallen from grace and was far behind Europe, they held out Christianity and westernization as redemption for the continent. West Indian intellectuals believed that slavery was an act of providence and that it was their duty to embrace western civilization and save the continent of their forefathers.

For blacks in the Caribbean, there was no better way to achieve this goal than through that great civilizing force, the British Empire. Thus, the civilizationism of African-Americans often presented itself as imperial fanaticism among Afro-Caribbeans and a desire to participate in Britain's imperial project.<sup>24</sup> In 1899, Barbadian Albert Thorne along with Baptist minister Rev. T. Gordon Somers, held a meeting calling for the colonization of a portion of the British colony of Nyasaland by Afro-Caribbeans. Dr. Thorne stated his objectives as returning Afro-Caribbeans to their "fatherland," to "develop agricultural, commercial, and other available resources" of Nyasaland, to educate Africans, "to extend the Kingdom of God in those vast regions, by leading such as are in darkness and error or superstition to Jesus Christ," to "improve the status of the African race," and to improve the relationship "between all races of mankind."<sup>25</sup> Though his plans for a colony in Nyasaland were not dissimilar from other black colonizing schemes, Dr. Thorne's activities in Nyasaland would have been merely an adjunct to British domination in Africa. Even Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association, which so vehemently lashed out at European imperialism in Africa, was steeped in the terminology of British imperialism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1991), 251-255

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 258.

Thus, black intellectuals in the Americas inserted themselves into the western tradition and embarked from there on a modernizing mission to gain full access to what they believed to be the treasures of western civilization. This often involved deliberate attempts at destroying Africanisms in their own syncretic cultures, particularly in the U.S., and even led some ‘American Negroes’ to make attempts at ‘civilizing’ Africa.

#### The “Black Atlantic”

Paul Gilroy’s work on the “Black Atlantic” is an important antidote for early African-American and Afro-Caribbean attempts at deliberate insertion into a foreign modernity, which devalues Africa and their unique and syncretic cultural history. Gilroy correctly asserts that the “Black Atlantic” is neither solely American, European, or African and should not be collapsed into any of these cultural molds. Gilroy makes important strides towards describing a cluster of unique black cultures that are located between Africa, the Americas, and Europe that have more in common with each other than with the modern nations in which they are found. In describing these cultures, he identifies three major themes under which they can be united. First, these cultures share a popular memory of the terror of slavery. As he writes, slavery “has retained a central place in the historical memories of the black Atlantic” and these cultures, “continue to make creative communicative use of the memory of slavery.”<sup>27</sup> Secondly, the intellectual tradition of the Black Atlantic is marked by a critique of the modernity nourished by the transatlantic slave trade and “a preoccupation with the striking doubleness that results from this unique position- in an expanded West but not completely of it.” Descendants of African slaves, intellectuals in the “Black Atlantic” grapple with “an extended meditation both on the condition of the slaves and on the suggestion that racial terror is not merely compatible with occidental rationality but cheerfully complicit with it.”<sup>28</sup> Thirdly, Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” cultures reunite “art and life,” relying on artistic forms such as music, dance, and performance, as the principal means of expression.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>27</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 56, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 57



Recognition of the syncretic nature of “Black Atlantic” cultures and an acknowledgement of the central role that African cultures and the imagination of Africa plays in these unique Atlantic cultures, however, are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the preoccupation of black western intellectuals with an unsullied African origin stems from those aspects of Black Atlantic cultures, such as European standards of beauty, that are essentially negative and are best described as schizophrenic, not syncretic. Though it may not have been his intention, in his crusade against ethnic absolutism and essentialism, Gilroy goes beyond a realistic assessment of “Black Atlantic” cultures, and succeeds in detaching these syncretic cultures from their actual African moorings, by dehistoricizing the creation of “Black Atlantic” cultures. “The “Middle Passage,” as Joan Dayan notes, “becomes a metaphor, anchored somewhere in a vanishing history,” and this gives a “false idea of choice to forced migration,”<sup>30</sup> decenters Africa within the Black Atlantic, and confers a sense of innocence upon this particular case of cultural hybridity. Africa is only conspicuous in *The Black Atlantic* by its glaring absence because the ships afloat Gilroy’s Middle Passage appear to have severed its human cargo from Africa forever. As Dayan points out, Gilroy conceives of Black Atlantic cultures as consolation prizes from a brutal “plantation regime” that refuses to ‘offer’ anything more.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, in trying to give agency to black cultures in the occident, he incorrectly attributes their creation to the cultural loopholes left uncovered by slave-owners. It appears then, that Black Atlantic culture is what modern western society allowed, not what developed when western society was not looking and could not understand. Black Atlantic culture, as it appears in *The Black Atlantic*, springs from Europe, not Africa.

Noting the absence of Africa in *The Black Atlantic*, Ntongela Masilela writes, “In a deeply saddening way, *The Black Atlantic* expresses an unremitting disdainfulness for Africa, for things African, and for things that come from our ‘dark Continent.’” He continues: “*The Black Atlantic* fails to register that the peregrinations of Richard Wright, W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R.

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<sup>30</sup> Joan Dayan, “Paul Gilroy’s Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor.” From *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4. [<http://iupjournals.org/ral/ral27-4.html>] (1 January 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Dayan, “Paul Gilroy’s Slaves, Ships, and Routes,” 3. See Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 56-57.

James, and others *in* Europe were in search for the historical meaning of Africa.”<sup>32</sup> Woefully, the Black Atlantic does not consider the dialog between the African Diaspora and Africa. It does not consider that, through the haze of western modernity, “Black Atlantic” intellectuals have consistently gazed upon themselves *and* Africa, and have tried to attach meaning to them both. It also does not acknowledge that a number of African intellectuals, particularly in South Africa, returned this gaze.

The “Black Atlantic” imposes severe restrictions on what is certainly a cluster of syncretic black cultures distinct from those of Africa and the occident and conversant with each other across the Atlantic. In focusing almost exclusively on the descendants of West African slaves living in the Caribbean, Britain, and particularly in the U.S., however, Gilroy loses sight of what should rightfully be called the black Atlantic. Not only does he overlook South America, but he also ignores those groups and individuals in Africa who, having never boarded a transatlantic slave ship, are afloat in the metaphorical middle passage nonetheless. As James Campbell shows, the first cohorts of South African students attending Wilberforce University at the behest of the A.M.E. Church were versed in the dialog of the Middle Passage well before they arrived in the United States:

These first students were not blank slates upon which African-American aspirations and sensibilities could be inscribed. On the contrary, they were products of a specific class at a particular historical moment. In mission parlance, they were “school people,” members of a narrow, highly conscious Christian elite that first took root in the eastern Cape and later blossomed on the diamond fields. What evidence we have suggests that they shared the characteristic attitudes of their class- the devotion to education, the preoccupation with respectability, the ambivalent feelings of duty and disdain toward their “uncivilised” cousins. In the students’ own terms, they were “progressive” Africans, a word that conveyed not only their commitment to Western-style progress but their sense of themselves as a racial vanguard. Indeed, choir members nightly reenacted the passage from “barbarism” to “civilisation,” performing the first half of their program in traditional dress and vernacular languages and the second half in English and Victorian costume.<sup>33</sup>

South Africa’s entrance into western modernity preceded any major influence from African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans, and as Masilela notes, was marked as a defeat. Thus

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<sup>32</sup> Ntongela Masilela, “The ‘Black Atlantic’ and African Modernity in South Africa,” *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4 (winter 1996): 87-95.

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, 253.

inserted into a modernity that was not their own, black South Africans responded by adopting “that which had enabled Europeans to triumph: modernity,” and, “invariably,” “forced” modernization meant Westernization,” in this case.<sup>34</sup> South Africa’s entrance into European modernity and the subsequent emergence of a class of Africans who responded to western modernity in much the same way that African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans did is important because it raises questions about the “Black Atlantic” and whether it must be restricted to a segment of the African Diaspora. As Campbell notes, the beliefs of this new African elite in South Africa made them “uncannily receptive” to the work of the A.M.E. Church and to “the idea that blacks themselves would carry the light of Christian civilization into Africa.”<sup>35</sup> And in receiving African-Americans, this African elite entered a centuries-long dialogue between the cultures of the “Black Atlantic.” Though having never experienced the terror of slavery, were these South Africans living within the “Black Atlantic” as well? In their response to their military defeat by Europeans, were these Africans with their Victorian dress and “uncivilised cousins” creating a syncretic culture of their own? What can we say of Coloured South Africans and the “Black Atlantic”?

I want to suggest that, like the African elite, Coloured elites in Cape Town related to ‘American Negroes’ because they too had syncretic cultural practices and occupied analogous rungs on the hierarchies of a foreign western modernity and responded to their subjugation by attempting to ascend the cultural ladder. Though I do not think that Coloureds fit easily into Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” because of its restriction to a segment of the African Diaspora and because of the unique history and legacies of Cape slavery and segregation, I do think that the emergence of a modern Coloured identity situated between the African and European populations in the late nineteenth century facilitated the Coloured elite’s appropriation of certain aspects of Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” experience and allowed it to function almost effortlessly within the “Black Atlantic.”

#### A Place in the Black Atlantic

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<sup>34</sup> Masilela, “The ‘Black Atlantic’ and African Modernity in South Africa,” 90.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 253.

The origins of Cape Town's Coloured community can be found in the unique history of slavery in the Cape, social policies of the British government, and the Coloured group's historical disposition to be defined as such. Though there have been several significant contributions to our understanding of what Ian Goldin calls the "reconstitution of Coloured identity" in the early twentieth century, "the making of the coloured people," as writes Mohamed Adhikari, "into a self-conscious social group was a process that grew partly out of Cape slavery and that culminated half a century after Emancipation in the crystallization of the colored identity in its fully fledged form."<sup>36</sup> The nature of slavery in the Cape before full emancipation in 1838 and the class and race relations it fostered and reflected were instrumental in the creation of what came to be understood as the Coloured community at the turn of the century.

When the British captured the Cape first in 1795 and again in 1806, it was faced with a rather unique colonial society that, under Dutch rule, had propped up a class structure that, relative to those in the U.S. and Caribbean, was rather permeable, and a form of slavery that would have been unfamiliar to the British. Racial stratification in the Cape was not what it was in the Americas. As George M. Fredrickson points out, one need only examine the different ways in which societies in the Americas and the Cape addressed the inevitable offspring between European colonists and the black underclass in order to understand group stratification in the formerly Dutch Cape and spot the potential troubles facing a British government there.

It is unhelpful to understand racial stratification in Cape Town within the same context as colonial societies in the Western Hemisphere. Race and class in Dutch-run Cape Town was understood in much the same way as it was in other Dutch possessions in the East Indies. In these colonies, the offspring of Dutch colonists and Asian women—through marriage or out of wedlock—tended to be officially recognized as a lower tier within European society. This practice led, eventually, to half of those classified as Europeans in Dutch East Indian colonies, being of mixed racial parentage. Such was the basis for race and class stratification in the Cape.<sup>37</sup> In the Cape, class structure was such that "race mattered in the determination of status

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<sup>36</sup> Ian Goldin, "The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity in the Western Cape," in *The Politics of Race Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, edited by Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (London and New York: Longman Group, 1987); Mohamed Adhikari, "'The Sons of Ham': Slavery and the Making of Coloured Identity," paper presented at 'Cape Slavery – and After' Conference, University of Cape Town, August 1989, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 94-97.

but was not all-important,” according to George M. Fredrickson. Thus, under the Dutch, the Cape was essentially a two-tier society with the tip of the top tier occupied by white officials of the Dutch East India Company and the bottom of the top tier by non-white and white freepersons.

As in the Dutch possessions of the East Indies, a significant number of the offspring of Dutch-slave and Dutch-Khoisan offspring were incorporated into the bottom of the top tier of Cape society. The bottom tier was the domain of the servile class, which was composed of non-whites who were not of the same race, largely racially mixed, not of the same religion, not all enslaved, and of foreign and indigenous origin.<sup>38</sup> Within the servile class were slaves and indigenous Khoisan servants. The relationship between class and race in the Cape was clearly not one-to-one.

At the time of both British occupations, slaves outnumbered white settlers. Not until 1807 when Britain abolished the slave trade and the Cape experienced an influx of British colonists, did the European settler population overtake the slaves in number.<sup>39</sup> This in itself was not unusual as several of Britain’s colonies, particularly in the Caribbean where many plantations were owned by absentee planters, had similarly small white populations. Unlike slavery in the British West Indian colonies, though, slavery in the Cape subjected both Africans from the east and west coasts and Southeast Asians to captivity. This made for a unique slave population that was, eventually, largely racially mixed.

Not only did the slaves mix with each other, but European men often found concubines among this class, while Khoisan women frequently had children with slave men. Though nominally free, indigenous Khoikhoi had been all-but incorporated into the forced labor system by the end of the eighteenth century. With their societies decimated by several smallpox outbreaks and their movement restricted by “apprenticeship” laws, Khoikhoi often suffered worse treatment than slaves.<sup>40</sup> The San, as well, though on a smaller scale, were compelled to join the work force. Collectively known as Khoisan, these groups contributed to the racially and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 88, 116-117.

<sup>39</sup> *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa* 53; Mohamed Adhikari, “‘The Sons of Ham,’” 3.

<sup>40</sup> Mohamed Adhikari, “‘The Sons of Ham,’” 12; J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*. (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University, Press, 1957), 6-7; Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 90.

culturally mixed nature of the Cape's bottom class, as the women in these groups had children with slaves and Europeans. The children of Khoisan women and slave and European men came to be known as Bastard Hottentots and usually sought refuge in independent Bastard communities in the countryside. The offspring of slave men and Khoikhoi women were apprenticed to the owners of their fathers during the periods 1775-99 and 1812-28, augmenting the slave class.

As in the Dutch East Indies, East Indian slave women in the Cape and those slave women of mixed racial parentage were often able to ascend the ladder of social mobility in the Cape by marrying Dutch colonists. The children of these marriages—particularly the women—often married white men, and were thus integrated into the Cape's upper white class. The male offspring of such mixed unions were also able to marry white women, but were most likely to do so if they were of a light complexion and had highly respectable white fathers.<sup>41</sup>

A significant number of blacks in the Cape, therefore, were able to become 'white', though most were relegated to the servile class. As a result of Dutch rule in the Cape, 'Whiteness' was not so much a race as it was a class to which it was conceivable that anyone could belong, particularly those who were European, partly European, or approximated European notions of civility and beauty. The position of the small free black population in the Cape is a testament to this fact. As members of the colony's lower upper class, free blacks included criminals and exiles from the East, and manumitted slaves.<sup>42</sup> Before 1790, free blacks appear to have been legally guaranteed the same rights and freedoms as white burghers. And not only was there no ban prohibiting their marriage to whites, but such marriages were common and accepted. Though their legal status may not have precluded racial discrimination, the Cape's free black population was exemplary of the possibilities for black social mobility in the Cape. In effect, it was possible in the Cape to be born a slave and to die as low-class white person.<sup>43</sup> In this way, the attitude towards racial mixture in the U.S. and the Cape diverged sharply.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 117-118.

<sup>42</sup> Though both Africans and Asians were the beneficiaries of manumission in the Cape, a disproportionate number of manumitted slaves between 1715 and 1794 were East Indians, Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 117.

<sup>43</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 86-87, 117; Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*, 9-10.

<sup>44</sup> On several occasions while living in post-apartheid Cape Town, I have been told by Coloured South Africans and whites that the main similarity between African-Americans and Coloureds is that we are racially mixed. In trying to explain to me why 'American Negroes' identified with Coloured South Africans, the Coloured descendant of a

While the white upper class in the Cape included a number of individuals who were not, strictly speaking, white, the servile class was invariably non-white. The servile class, therefore, spanned the divide between two poles—one of servitude as non-whites, or blacks, and the other of white privilege as members of the dominant colonial class. The relative fluidity of the class structure in the Cape, which allowed the black population to straddle the bottom and top of a two tier social system, and the nature of slavery in the colony, hastened the disappearance of the mother cultures of blacks in the Cape and encouraged the extensive assimilation of blacks into Cape colonial society. The extent to which blacks—slave and Khoisan—were able to integrate into white colonial society had a profound effect on their descendants, the Coloureds.

Though, some syncretic cultural practices did develop among the slaves and Khoisan, due to the nature of Cape slavery, slaves and Khoisan servants had little opportunity to develop their own culture apart from that of the dominant Europeans. They were often scattered about the countryside on small farms and many worked in Cape Town as house servants, laborers, or skilled crafts persons. Unlike slaves on the large plantations of the western hemisphere, low-class blacks in the Cape were often isolated from each other in work and leisure, having little opportunity to develop a sense of community or even structured families.<sup>45</sup> The slave population was also unable to reproduce itself sufficiently enough to maintain cultures or support the growth of a new amalgamated identity. That is not to mention that no group within the servile class was dominant; thus the many different languages and cultures of the slaves and the Khoisan were largely lost as there was no slave or servant culture- save for the religion of Islam for some- under which they could all unite and little opportunity for a fusion of the cultures. As Mohamed Adhikari convincingly argues, assimilation into colonial society appeared to be the only available option. Cape slaves and Khoisan overwhelmingly assimilated into the colony's dominant Cape Afrikaner culture, practicing Christianity, and speaking a local variant of Dutch.

In Cape Town, an alternative culture dominated by free blacks, who were almost a fifth of the city's population and forty percent of its black population, did arise in the late eighteenth

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West Indian immigrant used me as an example: "I look at you and I can see that somewhere along the line you have African, white, and Indian [Native American] blood. You are just like us. You're in the middle." In South Africa, I have often been at pains to explain that most African-Americans will not identify themselves as 'mixed', though they may readily concede that they probably are. As I believe about the institution of slavery, I do not think that racial mixture in and of itself can be a basis for social comparison unless it is internalized and acted upon in the same way.

<sup>45</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 89; Adhikari, "The Sons of Ham," 5.

century. According to Mohammad Adhikari, however, this culture, was merely a sub-group of dominant colonial culture bringing together free blacks, slaves, low-class Dutch, Khoi, and low-class Chinese in much the same way that Khoisan and slaves were united under colonial culture in the countryside.<sup>46</sup> And though slaves and Khoisan were largely assimilated into Cape culture, most remained in the bottom half of the two-tier society.<sup>47</sup>

By time slavery was completely abolished in 1838, the mixed offspring of Khoisan, slaves, and Europeans were often indistinguishable from Khoisan, Prize Negroes, and Bastards.<sup>48</sup> And, though slave and Khoisan were still distinct groups at emancipation, they continued to mix throughout the nineteenth century and were eventually lumped together as Coloureds by the British.

For their part, the British occupiers of the Cape, accustomed to relegating the mixed offspring of Europeans and blacks to either a middle mulatto class, as in the Caribbean, or to the bottom class, as in the United States, were wholly unprepared to deal with the class and racial stratification in the Cape. They, therefore, set about to make race and class in the Cape resemble as close as possible what they perceived to be the correct social order. The British, in seeking to organize Cape society were largely, though not completely, 'responsible' for the creation of the Coloured community. In many respects, as Rosemary Ridd notes, "the construction of this new race," was "an administrative, rather than a natural, process in the census reports of the Cape colony."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as the British colonial government set about anglicizing Cape Town and its buildings in the late nineteenth century, so too did it anglicize group stratification, entrenching it in British racial definitions. The Coloured population, in fact, first emerged as a defined group in the British censuses of the Cape not among the so-called people.

In a British move to racialize class in the Cape, the first British census of the Colony in 1807 separated 'free blacks' from the 'free burgher' category. In 1865, the British divided the population into two groups, European and Coloured.<sup>50</sup> Though a number of Cape whites were

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<sup>46</sup> Adhikari, "'The Sons of Ham,'" 9.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>48</sup> Marais, *The Cape Coloured People*, 12-13; Adhikari, "'The Sons of Ham,'" 12-13.

<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Ridd, "Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay Contrasted." Paper presented at Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, March 1993, 8.



unlikely to have been European in the sense that the British understood the term, it and the term Coloured—meaning non-European—were a familiar way for the British to take stock of the society. The Coloured group—sub-divided into Hottentot, Kaffir and Other—was created in an effort to organize the large portion of the population that could not be considered as a distinct dominated group, like Africans in the Americas, or as a truly intermediate group between a dominated group and dominant Europeans.<sup>51</sup> The British also believed that the rather small population of Bantu-speaking Africans was more ‘civilized’ than the “Blanket Kaffirs” beyond the eastern frontier. The British, therefore, did not think that they warranted a category of their own.<sup>52</sup> By dividing the population into Europeans and Coloureds, and excluding ‘free blacks’ from the ‘free burgher’ class, the British hardened the previously permeable boundary between the upper and lower tiers of Cape Dutch society, making race a more important determinant of class.

Race, though, still did not play a major role in status in the Cape. White men still legally married racially-mixed women, though their offspring were now considered Coloured. Coloureds were also still rising through the ranks of society and joining the European upper class, though they now were forced to do so somewhat clandestinely. Whereas before, the black lower class was able to join the upper class through marriage, wealth, or social standing, those who joined the European class in the late nineteenth century were said to “pass” for white. In addition to being a respected member of society, Coloureds who sought to be ‘white’ were increasingly required to appear racially white. Nevertheless, a substantial number of Coloureds ‘passed’ for white, so much so that it has been said that most of the Coloured elite became white, depriving the Coloured group of leadership.<sup>53</sup>

To accommodate a growing population of Africans in the Cape, by 1875 the Coloured category was divided into five groups: Malay, Fingo, Hottentot, Kafir, and Other. By 1891, these Coloured categories were explained to be five Coloured “races,” as opposed to the one

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<sup>50</sup> Ridd, “Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape,” 8; Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 129.

<sup>51</sup> Ridd, “Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay Contrasted.” Paper presented at Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, March 1993, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Goldin, “The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity in the Western Cape,” 158.

<sup>53</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 133; Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African ‘Coloured’ Politics* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987), 13. ‘Passing’ for white was also seen among some fair-skinned African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans.

European “race.” In so doing, the British appeared to recognize hard and fast genetic distinctions not only between their own white race and the Coloureds, but also among those they called Coloureds. With the British victory in the South African War and the absorption of millions of Bantu-speaking Africans into the Union of South Africa, the most important distinction in social groups came to be that between Europeans and Bantu-speaking Africans. The first census of the Union of South Africa in 1911 does away with the obvious clumsiness of five Coloured “races” and lists three racial categories in the country: European, Bantu and Mixed and Other.<sup>54</sup> Thus, on paper, the British appear to have simplified the racial quagmire they encountered when they took the colony from the Dutch. Coloureds in the Cape became an intermediate category of racially ambiguous individuals, who occupied what the British perceived as a space between themselves and Bantu-speaking Africans. The British had developed a system akin to the three-tier societies in their Caribbean colonies by ‘creating’ a western-style mulatto class.

Yet, as Fredrickson points out, Cape Town’s Coloured community is not a Coloured class in the strict sense that the word was used in the Americas by the British because its existence predated the major contact between the two polar ends of British society—Europeans and Bantu-speakers. That is Coloureds, though sandwiched in between Bantu-speakers and Europeans, were not a racial mixture of these two groups, which was a departure from British colonial policy in the Americas. The Coloured group created by the British encompassed both the mixed offspring of Europeans and blacks and the black parents—be they indigenous Khoisan or Malay or west African slaves. “Prize Negroes,” those Africans who after 1808 were captured by the British aboard slave ships destined for the Americas and had served a period of apprenticeship at the Cape, also seem to have been classified as Coloured.<sup>55</sup> It is clear that the British government, in making the Cape’s social hierarchy, ascribed different values to race, skin color, and culture, and assigned Coloureds- within western society, but not quite- an intermediate position between Africa and Europe.

As they had done through the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries, a number of the Coloured elite continued to seek better positions on the racial hierarchy by ‘passing’ for white and entering the European upper class or by rejecting the Coloured identity and

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<sup>54</sup> Ridd, “Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape,” 9-10.

<sup>55</sup> Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 132

assimilating into colonial society. By the turn of the century, however, a distinctly Coloured elite emerged with an appeal for Coloured solidarity in an effort to improve their deteriorating position in the Cape. Appealing to real Coloured perceptions of difference between themselves, whites, and Bantu-speaking Africans, the Coloured elite was able to consolidate Coloured identity because of its resonance with the beliefs of lower class Coloureds.<sup>56</sup> The message of those identifying themselves as Coloureds, though, was essentially the same as that of those who rejected the Coloured identity altogether and 'passed' for white. Both camps, whether by eschewing the Coloured identity or using it as a mobilizing force, were primarily concerned with assimilation into white colonial society by distancing themselves from their slave past and from the recently arrived Bantu-speaking Africans and emphasizing their partial whiteness and 'civilization'. As was the case with their slave forbears, integration into white Cape society continued to be the primary method of social advancement for Coloureds in the Cape.

The history of slavery was particularly problematic for the majority of those defined as Coloured. In effect, the Coloured identity served to single out those blacks in the Cape who descended from the Colony's servile class and confine them to the society's substratum. Slavery was a source of great insult and pain for late-nineteenth century Coloureds who were often taunted for their slave past and what was taken to be their inability to effectively resist slavery. It was even suggested that Coloureds, though now occupying a legally superior position to Africans in Cape society, were inferior to the Xhosa who had proved unwilling to be enslaved.<sup>57</sup> The identification as Coloured also associated them with the Khoisan who had long been considered by whites to be the most primitive peoples of the Cape. Even in what many today still hail as a liberal account of Coloured history, J.S. Marais degrades the image of the Khoisan, repeatedly remarking on their "weakness," "fragility," "feeble resistance," and their "readiness to enter the service of farmers."<sup>58</sup> Because of these negative associations, Coloureds suffered severe stigmatization in Cape society. Unlike in the United States where slavery became an important

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<sup>56</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith has argued that the consolidation of Coloured identity was also the continuation of a tradition of ethnic solidarity and political struggle first seen among all classes of Cape Town's Muslim community. See "The Emergence of Coloured Political Organisations and the Question of Coloured Identity in Cape Town, 1875-1902." Paper presented at 'Cape Slavery – and After' Conference, University of Cape Town, August 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Adhikari, "'The Sons of Ham,'" 25.

<sup>58</sup> Apparently, Marais' outdated book is the only published history of the Coloured people. Surely it is time for a new survey of Coloured history, one that does not refer to "Coloured backwardness" in its preface. See Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1957.

rallying point for both enslaved and free blacks, slavery in the Cape was a source of great shame. To add insult to injury, a significant number of Coloureds lived comfortably beyond the veil as 'Europeans'. It comes as no surprise, then, that the history of slavery was the first to be jettisoned by the Coloured elite who strove to rid themselves of an embarrassing past and prove their worthiness for integration into white society.<sup>59</sup>

By adopting the Coloured identity as a rallying point for assimilation into white Cape society, Coloureds were forced to accept a number of reconstructions of their history. First, they had to disown their slave past, fundamental to their intermediate position within Cape Society, and emphasize their partial whiteness. Secondly, by conceiving the Coloured group as a mulatto class in the manner common in the Americas, Coloured identity was portrayed as a new 'race',<sup>60</sup> though it was also used to designate indigenous Khoisan who were hardly in the infant stages of existence. Furthermore, by locating the Khoisan within a Coloured identity that stood in direct opposition to Bantu-speaking Africans, both Coloureds and Khoisan were stripped of their Africanness. In effect, Bantu-speakers became the only Africans and Coloureds could not be Bantu-speakers. These distortions of Coloured history and the identities of its constituent groups had major implications on their attempts to integrate into white society as a cohesive unit. By accepting an identity so heavily reliant upon western concepts of race and ethnicity, Coloureds were only able to modernize within the parameters of western society. Because they understood themselves within a western context, they were able to progress only in compliance with modern western traditions. They, thus, had to prove that they were as 'civilized' as whites in Cape Town. Though for very different reasons, across the Atlantic, African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were also modernizing themselves along western standards. When they arrived in Cape Town 'American Negroes' and Coloured elites found that despite their differences, they both existed within the modern western world and shared a desire to progress within it.

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<sup>59</sup> I was shocked when a University of Cape Town graduate told me that it was not until she entered high school that she became aware that Coloureds were the descendants of slaves. Granted, apartheid education was unlikely to harp upon Coloured slavery when the apartheid regime sought to use Coloureds as a buffer between itself and Africans, but historical memory cannot be totally obliterated in 46 years without the consent of the historical objects.

<sup>60</sup> The extent to which this has been internalized under apartheid is real and devastating. Some Coloured Capetonians seem to conceive of themselves as hybrids or as by-products of two incompatible species. They have told me, "we [Coloureds] are what happens when people mix."

In late nineteenth century Cape Town, the emergence of Coloured identity was both an administrative undertaking by the Cape colonial government, and a response by those labeled as Coloured to what they perceived to be increasingly segregationist attitudes. In addition to the government's hardening of the boundary between Europeans and Coloureds, the treaty ending the South African War brought much disappointment to those Coloureds who believed, as they had been told, that a British victory would extend the Cape's nonracial franchise to the interior. Instead, many began to believe that the government's ambivalence about the franchise could only mean that there was a chance that the racist policies of the interior would spread to the Cape.<sup>61</sup> The postwar era also brought with it a series of depressions and an influx of returning soldiers from the interior who all needed employment and intensified the competition for labor in the city. At the same time, Coloured laborers experienced hostility from white workers. In 1900 white stonemasons refused to work with Coloured stonemasons, and in 1901, the Plasterers Union prohibited Coloured membership and discouraged its laborers from working with Coloureds. Coupled with this was the influx of Bantu-speaking Africans who had all-but replaced Coloured workers as heavy manual laborers on the docks, at quarries, and in municipal services by 1890. By 1899 there were over 9 500 Bantu-speaking Africans in the Cape whereas in 1865, there were just 674.<sup>62</sup> These newly arrived Africans were third-class citizens under Cape colonial law, and immediately after the outbreak of bubonic plague almost all of them were forcibly removed from the city. If the treatment of Africans was anything to go by, Coloureds would be next. Already united by language, class, and circumstance, the Coloured elite mobilized their communities to address what they considered to be their ever-deteriorating situation in the Cape.

In 1901, John Tobin began holding what came to be called "Stone Meetings" at the top of Clifton Street in District Six on Sunday mornings to discuss the situation of Coloureds in the city. In his meetings, it was apparent that he was disgusted with the British who he felt had betrayed the Coloured people and exploited South Africans and the country's wealth for absentee rulers. He implored Coloureds to not respond to the surge in or fear of segregation by being

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<sup>61</sup> Goldin, "The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity in the Western Cape," 160-161.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 159-160.

ashamed of their color and trying to be European. Instead, he said, Coloureds should work with White people, especially the Dutch, with whom they share a language and a history.<sup>63</sup>

In September 1902, a letter signed by W. Collins, W. Stemmet, P.J. Eksteen, W. Carelse, P. Arendse, and W.A. Roberts and calling for a more structured organization through which to address Coloured concerns was circulated among the Coloured community. John Tobin, whose Stone meetings were the impetus for the letter, was conspicuous by the absence of his signature. He had quite a few differences with the other signatories, namely his call for blanket support of the Afrikaner South African Party and inclusion of other non-whites. Nevertheless, the letter garnered a fair amount of interest and later that month in Claremont, the African Political Organization was founded. It was the first significant Coloured political organization and a crucial moment in the emergence of Cape Town's Coloured community. By November the organization had 300 members in 5 branches in the Western Cape. By 1904 it had over 2 000 members in thirty-three branches.<sup>64</sup>

With an unswerving faith in the liberal principles of the British Empire, the A.P.O. was largely concerned with restoring previous levels of Coloured participation in the mainstream of white Cape society. It hoped that the encroachment of segregation in the Cape was a temporary lapse in what it felt was the Empire's otherwise liberal and 'civilizing' approach in southern Africa. And, though J. Tobin, advocated support of the SAP, he too was primarily concerned with full Coloured inclusion in mainstream white society. To this end, the A.P.O. adopted a policy that was largely assimilationist, agitating for inclusion into white society while proving Coloured worth. W. Collins, the interim president, proposed two strategies by which the A.P.O.'s goals could be met: political mobilization behind parliamentary candidates and the 'civilization' of the Coloured community. As Gavin Lewis notes, the A.P.O. believed that Coloureds could be civilized, "by education, economic self-help, and the adoption of white middle-class standards of behaviour. With a civilized status and political mobilisation would come the equal rights promised by liberal politicians." W.Collins contended that the A.P.O. would show the government that there was "an educated class of Coloured people in Cape Town," who were different from the "uneducated barbarians." In combating notions of Coloured inferiority, the

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<sup>63</sup> R.E. van der Ross, "The Founding of the African Peoples Organization in Cape Town in 1903 and the Role of Dr. Abdurahman." *Munger Africana Library Notes* no. 28 (February 1975), 10.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis. *Between the Wire and the Wall*, 19-20; van der Ross, "The Founding of the African Peoples Organization," 11, 16.

A.P.O. championed Coloured temperance. In 1904, it called for end to the sale of liquor to Coloured women and the 'tot' system whereby wine farmers paid their Coloured workers with alcohol. Fundraising was also stressed as a means of Coloured self-help and as a way to strengthen Coloured unity. A.P.O. branches sponsored tea parties, bazaars, literary and musical events in order to hone Coloured 'respectability'.<sup>65</sup>

Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman was elected as the A.P.O.'s second president after Collins and Tobin, president and vice-president respectively, were ousted for supporting opposing parties in the parliamentary elections. Abdurahman, the A.P.O.'s most prolific president who served from 1905 until his death in 1940 stated in his first presidential address in 1906 that Coloureds were morally superior to Europeans. He bestowed the honor of intellectual superiority, however, upon Europeans. It was the duty of the Coloureds to catch up, he said.<sup>66</sup> As a British trained medical doctor, Abdurahman was a fervent anglophile and intensified the A.P.O.'s aims for Coloured assimilation, particularly into Cape British society. As Mohamed Adhikari points out, the first edition of the *APO* newsletter, which began under Abdurahman's leadership, was particularly concerned with making it understood that Coloureds were, "the product of 'civilization' and that while they were "of varying degrees of admixture... the features of a large proportion of them are wholly caucasian and their mode of life conforms with the best European model."<sup>67</sup> By emphasizing their partial whiteness, seeking to prove that Coloureds were westernized, and promoting only Coloured rights in the face of segregation against all blacks, the A.P.O. distanced itself from Bantu-speaking Africans in the name of progress.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 20, 23, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Abdullah Abdurahman, *Say it Out Loud: The A.P.O Presidential Address and Other Major Political Speeches, 1906-1940, of Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman*. Collected, edited and with a biographical Introduction by R.E. van der Ross, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Mohamed Adhikari, "Ambiguity, Assimilationism and Anglophilism in South Africa's Coloured Community: The Case of Piet Uithalder's Satirical Writings, 1909-1922." Paper , 7.

<sup>68</sup> According to R.E. van der Ross, the statements by General Smuts that Coloured people were "an appendage of the Whites," by General Hertzog that Coloureds "were to be treated on an equality with the Whites, economically and politically" and Dr. D.F. Malan's assertion that the vote should be extended to Coloured women, all encouraged Abdurahman and even future "more radical" leaders of the A.P.O. to "believe that the Coloured people were destined to return to the mainstream of South African politics and development, as equal partners with the major policy-makers." Perhaps Cape Town's Coloureds had more incentive to 'modernize' than blacks in the Caribbean and the U.S.

In a remarkable fusion of West Indian, Coloured, and African-American views on black progress, Frances Herman Gow, Bethel A.M.E. minister and United States-educated son of Afro-Caribbean Frances McDonald Gow and his Coloured wife Sarah, held a 1935 pageant in honor of the emancipation of Cape Town's slaves in 1834. In fourteen episodes and a finale, Gow's pageant portrayed the evolution of the Coloured people from primitive Africans to the first bright lights of modernity.

True to late nineteenth century form, Gow located the main characters in his play along the racial hierarchy beginning with "the Bushmen, four feet high; flat nose, high cheek-boned, living in the bush," followed by "the Hottentot a step or two improved," and then "the mighty Bantu." "Fearless" white men, who opposed "angry waves," and "an awful south easter" that made, "the very earth tremble," however, capped Gow's social pyramid. The white men, in their determination and strength, "anchor and plant the cross of an overpowering faith" on African soil. And, though the local "savage people prove intractable," the white men, "who braved the tempests can also quiet human ragings; and so they won!" Thus, the stage was set.

Beginning in the seventeenth century when the land passed from the hands of the Khoisan with their "primitive habits and questionable standards of morality," to "the hands of the fittest," those "adventurous mariners," the Dutch, Gow traced the steady ascent of Coloureds toward the great white peak of civilization. Jan Van Riebeeck was praised for that singular moment when he landed in the Cape, setting into motion those events, which "helped to raise the African from his savagery and to make him what he is... and what he will become." And, though the infamous seventeenth century marriage between the young Khoikhoi girl, Eva, to a Dutch surgeon "was not a success" with Eva "reverting to type" after her husband's death, Gow assured his audience that Coloured people were ever "impelled towards that higher destiny which, please God, will always beckon us onward and upward." It was, perhaps, the final paragraph of Gow's foreword to the performance that could easily have been uttered by blacks in the United States or the Caribbean and best revealed the frantic strivings of a black elite who were convinced that they were lagging behind on the road to modernity.

The Coloured Race is still in the making! She still forges onward with infantile endeavors, and moves with questioning step towards the opening door. After awhile, enriched by the energies of those who for the moment have passed her by, she will catch a gleam of her heaven born opportunities, and step by step will ascend the Ladder of Progress!<sup>69</sup>



The resemblance of Gow's statement to the words of Henry McNeal Turner or Edward Blyden is no coincidence. Though it does not appear that Coloureds shared the "Black Atlantic's" popular memory of the terror of slavery, they did enter western modernity as cultural and racial inferiors, and shared the "Black Atlantic's" double consciousness as insiders who remained on the fringes of Cape society. As blacks who usually spoke fluent English, were often Christian, and who appeared to move with ease through Cape colonial society with its British social customs, western body of knowledge, and technologies, 'American Negroes' were considered to be important models of western modernity for the Coloured elite in Cape Town. As black westerners, 'American Negroes' contradicted Cape Town's new racial hierarchy in which only Europeans were 'civilized', 'American Negroes' were a testament of what blacks in Cape Town could achieve through modernization and assimilation into Anglo-Cape society.

Such westernized blacks caused quite a stir in Cape Town. During the Second World War, Coloured Bethel A.M.E. minister Rev. Frances H. Gow often gathered some of the young women from the church to help him entertain African-American sailors whose ships were docked in Table Bay.<sup>70</sup> He and members of the Free Gardeners Association and others entertained the 35 African-American sailors from the 800-man crew of the U.S.S. Boise, which was docked in Table Bay in 1938, with music, conversation, and a speech by Gow.<sup>71</sup> The deference paid 'American Negroes' by white Capetonians would only have intensified Coloured admiration of the black westerners. A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner was "amused" by city whites who upon seeing him whispered among themselves: "'They are not Negroes; they are Americans.' It was as though their Americanness confirmed their cultural sophistication and triumphed over the stigma of their black skins. This is the first place we have ever been," he said, "that the white people refused to let us be Negro," wrote Turner, "True, in England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Italy our color has been no bar, but they never refused us the high honor of being a Negro till we reached here."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Francis H. Gow, *Souvenir: 1834-1934, Historical Pageant Held at Green Point Track*. [Cape Town]: 1935.

<sup>70</sup> Frances Hermine Williams. Personal interview by author. Richmond, U.S.A, 9 January 2003.

<sup>71</sup> "Our Visitors," *The Cape Standard*, 22 November 1938.

Blacks in Cape Town and, in fact, throughout South Africa, often saw ‘American Negroes’ as exemplars of what blacks could achieve. This fascination with ‘American Negroes’, however, predated Turner’s historic visit to Cape Town. In the winter of 1890 Orpheus M. McAdoo and his Virginia Jubilee Singers arrived in Cape Town where they began a hugely successful concert tour that took them throughout South Africa. With their repertoire of African-American “sorrow songs” and American minstrel tunes, the group was an instant hit with both black and white South Africans. For black South Africans, though, the Jubilee Singers were living testimony to the potential of blacks in Africa. *Imvo Zabantsundu* dedicated several articles of praise to the Jubilee Singers who it claimed as “brethren from America.” The Jubilee Singers, it believed, had proven that, “Africans possessed musical talents of an exceptional order, which needed cultivation to turn them to good account.” It was “reserved for our countrymen in America,” it felt, “to give an object lesson as to the development these dormant gifts are capable of.” The performance of the Jubilee Singers, it continued, “has suggested reflection to many who, without such a demonstration, would have remained skeptical as to the possibility, not to say probability, of the Natives of this country being raised to anything above remaining as perpetual hewers of wood and drawers of water.”<sup>73</sup>

Not even thirty years removed from centuries of slavery, African-Americans, or ‘American Negroes’, had become a model for what blacks could achieve under freedom, but more importantly through intervention or “cultivation.” Indeed as Denis-Constant Martin writes, the songs of the Jubilee Singers, “told of black experience in the United States, of hopes of freedom and uplift, but sang in a musical idiom that adapted original slave melodies to European harmony.”<sup>74</sup> A little over a decade later, the *South African Spectator* asserted that, “It is generally admitted, and the observant traveller [sic] very readily acknowledges that whatever other faults he may possess—that for polite manners, for polish, and for correctness of demeanor and general conduct on the streets, no one excels the American Negro... and however otherwise he has suffered as the victim of slavery, he has acquired a polish in bondage which was enhanced

<sup>72</sup> “Picturesque Cape Town and It’s Queer People: Bishop Turner Writes Interestingly of the Sight and Peculiarities of the South African City---Population of All Shades and Colors and Many Languages,” Supplement to *Voice of Missions*, 1 June 1898. Cape Town Repository, NA 497 A96.

<sup>73</sup> “Native Opinion: The Jubilee Singers,” *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 16 October 1890.

<sup>74</sup> Denis-Constant Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999), 87

by... contact with a people with whom politeness is among the virtues.”<sup>75</sup> Slavery, the *Spectator* not so subtly advanced, had rendered the African-American ‘respectable’.

Cape Town’s emerging Coloured elite believed that it had to follow the blueprint set by ‘American Negroes’ in order to address the rise of segregation in the city. As Ntongela Masilela writes of New Africans, it was imperative that Coloureds carry out “the re-invention of a new identity, the will to power, the recreation of the race by renaming it, and the demonstration of skill and knowledge,” just as African-Americans did in fashioning themselves as Negroes.<sup>76</sup> For Coloureds, this translated into stripping the Coloured identity of its negative connotations, instilling it with ‘race’ pride, giving it a political and cultural voice, and showcasing its ‘civilization’. Coloureds had to become modern and claim their rightful place in ‘civilized’ Cape society. The ‘American Negro’ community was an important model for this endeavor.

Perhaps in no other realm was the image of the ‘American Negro’, particularly African-Americans, transmitted throughout the world than in music. Though demeaning, black-face minstrelsy was the first contact that many within and outside the U.S. had with the image and, in some cases reality, of African-Americans. Minstrelsy had been popular among Coloureds, and most others in the Cape, since at least 1880, probably through the Christy Minstrels who performed in the city in 1862 and the wave of other Minstrel troupes that performed in the city afterwards. U.S. minstrelsy “brought to South Africa new music, new songs, new dance steps and an original way of enacting racial relations,”<sup>77</sup> and it is likely that for Coloureds it created a space for community development and evaluation of racial identity.

Black-face minstrelsy, performed by Coloureds as early as 1886, became popular in the Cape just as segregation was mounting and Bantu-speaking blacks were entering the colony in larger numbers. Minstrelsy—imported, western, and dominated by white actors- probably seemed like an appropriate and novel form of entertainment in the increasingly anglicized and race-conscious Cape and it was probably one of many ways in which Coloureds addressed, in the language of the colonialists, what they thought was a deteriorating situation in the Cape. Furthermore, it may have allowed Coloureds, who were desperate to discard the stigma of

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<sup>75</sup> “Vicarious Suffering,” *The South African Spectator*, 18 October 1902.

<sup>76</sup> Ntongela Masilela, “New Negroism and New Africanism: The Influence of United States Modernity on the Construction of South African Modernity,” *Renaissance Noir*, 51.

<sup>77</sup> Martin, *Coon Carnival*, 79-80.

slavery a chance to mock their slave past and white stereotypes. By performing slavery and portraying the black buffoons whites perceived them to be, Coloureds may have been drawing a distinction between show and reality. There may have been a sense, in fact, that by playing the 'nigger' one was not the 'nigger'.

The 'sorrow songs' performed by the Jubilee Singers had a profound effect on Coloureds in Cape Town. The tour of the Jubilee Singers was significant because, unlike other U.S. singing troupes, they were African-Americans. When the African-American Jubilee Singers performed their 'sorrow songs', which were entirely new to audiences in the Cape, within the same space that they performed standard minstrel tunes, it may have had the added effect of suggesting that African-Americans were no longer the 'happy darkies' in the minstrel songs but progressive and captivating vocalists whose power emanated from the pain in their voices. An article appearing in the *Indianapolis Freeman* shortly after the Jubilee Singers departed South Africa in 1898 described Orpheus McAdoo as "prosperous, and an Australian by adoption... In his accent he is decidedly English. He dresses well in the style of the English upper class... He wears a few diamonds within the bounds of propriety... From all indications he is a thorough gentleman from tip to tip."<sup>78</sup> Though, it too may have been a performance, McAdoo's reality, was neither that of the clowning 'minstrel' nor that of the somber and humble Negro longing for freedom. Surely some satisfaction must have come to McAdoo—and to Coloured audiences in Cape Town—from knowing that he was, or at least appeared to be, beyond them both.

Increasingly in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, Coloureds consciously assimilated into white western society by fashioning themselves into 'progressive' 'American Negroes.' It would seem that the Coloured elite identified with 'American Negroes' by understanding themselves as the 'American Negroes of the Cape' and by appropriating 'American Negro' history, literary and artistic achievements, and ideas as their own.

The growth of Bethel A.M.E. church into a meeting place for the emerging Coloured elite was, perhaps, the greatest example of Coloureds identifying with 'American Negroes'. Though there was a Baptist church in the city headed by an African-American minister, Bethel A.M.E. appears to have been the major icon of the 'American Negro' community, and alone, was able to appeal to the Coloured elite's desires to associate with 'American Negroes'. In large part, this

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Veit Erlmann, "'A Feeling of Prejudice'. Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers in South Africa, 1890-1898," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (April 1988): 331-350, 340.

had to do with the A.M.E. church's devotion to western-style progress. The A.M.E. had gone to great lengths in the U.S. to encourage African-American modernity by suppressing unique and syncretic forms of African-American worship, and had even stressed the importance of transferring the blessing of western 'civilization' to Africa. The Baptist church, on the other hand, had not done as much to prevent emotionalism, spontaneity, and elements of African-American slave worship in its services. In fact, if the experience of the Baptist Church in the United States is any measure of its Cape Town mission, the church in Cape Town would have encouraged a more free-spirited church service than Bethel. Though Bethel A.M.E. was the church of choice for most of Cape Town's American Negroes,' it appears that some did attend the Baptist church. In 1903, after Cape Town's Baptist Church seceded, Robert Williams resigned from the Bethel A.M.E. board because he could not "get used to Methodist ways as he was raised Baptist."<sup>79</sup> It is possible that other 'American Negroes' attended Baptist services as well. By the end of the Great Awakening, the Baptist church was the religious home to the largest proportion of African-Americans in the United States and African-Americans George Lisle and Moses Baker founded the first Baptist Church in Jamaica shortly after the American War for Independence so it would not have been wholly unfamiliar to many Afro-Caribbeans either.<sup>80</sup> The Baptist missionary board in the U.S., however, does not appear to have invested much into Cape Town. By 1902, Rev. Jackson's Colored Baptist Church seceded from its parent body in the U.S. because of lack of support and a shrinking congregation.<sup>81</sup>

It was no coincidence that Dr. Abdurahman, a Muslim, delivered his first presidential address to the A.P.O. at Bethel A.M.E.'s school, Bethel Institute or that W. Collins was a Bethel A.M.E. lay preacher and member of the Ethiopian Lodge, which had been founded by Bethel A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin. And, though John Tobin was "sort of a free lance" and "not connected with any church," he was also, "a frequent worshipper in Bethel Church."<sup>82</sup> There is

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<sup>79</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting Minutes, 12 January 1903. Williams must have been either an Afro-Caribbean or an Afro-American as the Baptist Church in Cape Town was not established until 1894—far too late for him to have been raised as a Baptist.

<sup>80</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 152.

<sup>81</sup> Secession of the Colored Baptists from the American Board," *The South African Spectator*, 8 February 1902; See also "The Coloured Baptist Church in South Africa," *The South African Spectator*, 20 April 1901.

also something to be said for the possibility of the A.P.O. being so named under the influence of Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans at Bethel. Though the A.P.O. did not explicitly ban African membership, it was, in practice, an exclusively Coloured organization. It is likely that in identifying the organization as African, it was locating itself not only within the continent, but within a larger African, or black, world as did the A.M.E. church.

Beyond Bethel A.M.E., the identification with ‘American Negroes’ has been preserved, or perhaps created, by one myth about the origins of the Coon Carnival. One veteran Coon troupe captain said, “he has heard it from older Coon leaders that the idea was planted here by American Negro seamen, who, while their ships were in port, would gather and sing their songs to the accompaniment of a guitar or banjo. The local lads would gather round and join in, and so the Coons were founded.”<sup>83</sup>

Coloureds also became interested in African-American history and current events, though often at the encouragement of African-Americans. Like the editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*, John Tengo Jabavu, who believed that the tour of the Jubilee Singers would “lead to the awakening in their countrymen here of an interest in the history of the civilisation of the Negro race in America, and a knowledge of their history is sure to result beneficially to our people generally,”<sup>84</sup> the Coloured elite felt it had a vested interest in understanding the history of ‘American Negro’ progress in the Americas. The *South African Spectator* frequently ran articles on U.S. current events such as one on Louisiana’s black governor in 1901 and the only African-American mayor in the United States in 1902. It also devoted two entire pages of one edition to the listing of lynch victims in the U.S., in order to “arouse” public opinion.<sup>85</sup> The Jubilee Singers also began many of their performances with short lessons on African-American history, to the interest of their black audiences who found them inspirational.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> “Mr. John Tobin,” *South African Spectator*, 8 February 1902; “The First Coloured Lodge of Freemasons in South Africa,” *The South African Spectator*, 29 December 1901.

<sup>83</sup> R.E. van der Ross, *Coloured Viewpoint: A Series of Articles in the Cape Times, 1958-1965* by R.E. van der Ross, compiled by J. L. Hattingh and H. C. Bredekamp, 33.

<sup>84</sup> “Native Opinion: the Jubilee Singers,” *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 16 October 1890.

<sup>85</sup> “America,” *The South African Spectator*, 20 April 1901; *The South African Spectator*, 8 February 1902; “Lynch Law in America,” *The South African Spectator*, 23 February 1901.

<sup>86</sup> Erlmann, “‘A Feeling of Prejudice,’” 344.

Coloureds also saw ‘American Negroes’ as important examples of group unity and pride. Many African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans had a considerable degree of race consciousness from their experiences in the Americas and as black seamen. By referring to the words and deeds of prominent African-Americans, Coloured leaders located themselves within what they saw as a tradition of racial unity, collective struggle, and progress. In a sense, they were locating themselves in the history of the “Black Atlantic.” F.H. Gow, for instance, inspired the audience of his pageant with the words of Frederick Douglass, “that great man of our own colour,”<sup>87</sup> In so doing, he identified Coloureds as being among a global black race, which encouraged Coloured race feeling. Several members of the Coloured elite were also known to celebrate the U.S. Independence day with ‘American Negroes’, their “kinsmen from beyond the sea.” One such celebration, attended by John Tobin and Henry Thomas, a Coloured candidate for the Assembly, was used as a platform for the Coloured commitment to “organisation for the common good.” Adapting the theme of independence to Cape Town’s Coloured community, a Mr De Jager “urged that by our works we may uphold that great gift and the noble privilege of liberty which we enjoy, and that by God’s help we may be ever found on the side of those who struggle for justice and liberty.”<sup>88</sup>

At a time when the Afrikaans language enjoyed little prominence among the Anglicized Cape, Coloured Capetonians also looked to African-American music and literature, which was all in English. African-American ‘sorrow songs’ were treated as sacred music by the Coloured ministers of the A.M.E. church, particularly Rev. Francis H. Gow, who eventually became the first and, to this date the only, African bishop in the A.M.E. church.<sup>89</sup> The third act of his play commemorating the emancipation of the slaves was set to ‘Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,’ ‘I’m so Glad Trouble Don’t Last Always,’ ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot’.<sup>90</sup> The fourth act, as well, was set to African-American music. This act, dealing with the interracial marriage

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<sup>87</sup> Francis H. Gow, *Souvenir: 1834-1934, Historical Pageant Held at Green Point Track*. [Cape Town]: 1935.

<sup>88</sup> “Celebrating the Fourth,” *The South African Spectator*, 18 July 1901.

<sup>89</sup> The current minister of Bethel A.M.E. is currently campaigning to become the second.

<sup>90</sup> The twelfth act portraying Chief Khama receiving a Bible, “the secret” of the British Empire, from Queen Elizabeth was set to ‘Rule Britannia’. Francis H. Gow, *Souvenir: 1834-1934, Historical Pageant Held at Green Point Track*. [Cape Town]: 1935.

between Eva and the white physician in the Cape and her subsequent reversion to a 'lowly' Hottentot was accompanied by:

Massa dear, Massa dear, O look down awhile,  
Wind am still, night am clear, You can hear de chile.  
All de home folks is gone, and I'm lonesome here,  
Work is o'er, day so done, Take me, Massa, dear.  
Take me home for de light went away wid you,  
Take me home fum de night, as you used to do.

One cannot help but wonder in what context this song was originally sung- serious or sarcastic. Nevertheless, it speaks volumes to F.H. Gow's understanding of the song's meaning and the way in which he believed the experiences of 'American Negroes' and Coloureds were similar. Interestingly enough, instead of looking to the particular history of Cape slavery for inspiration, Gow appears to have jumped the ocean, making sense of Cape slavery by placing it within the foreign context of the African Diaspora. A recent editorial by Richard van der Ross sheds light on Gow's use of African-American 'sorrow songs' in his play. Van Der Ross asks, "I wonder why we have not produced anything equivalent to the "sorrow music" of American slaves... Does the answer lie in the possibly different relationships between master and slaves on the different sides of the Atlantic?"<sup>91</sup> It would seem that the 'sorrow songs' added the terror element and master-slave relationship necessary to locate Cape slavery within the experience of the Black Atlantic. Gow, who was said to have spoken with an American accent, also staged a play called 'Up From Slavery,' of the same name as Booker T. Washington's famous book, and another called "Hiawatha," in tribute to Native Americans.<sup>92</sup>

The Coloured elite was particularly concerned with the suffusion of the English language throughout all levels of the Coloured community, and 'American Negroes' were perfect examples of black first-language speakers. English was an important symbol of progressiveness in the wake of the South African War, which pitted the mighty and liberal British Empire against the segregationist independent Boer republics. For blacks in the Americas and in Cape Town, it became important to take sides in the conflict. And in much the same way that African-Americans praised the liberal U.S. President Abraham Lincoln and the northern United States for the abolition of slavery, black modernists in the Cape praised the

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<sup>91</sup> "Cape slaves did not sing of sorrow," *Cape Times*, 4 August 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Martin, *Coon Carnival*, 94; Donald Kleinsmidt, Personal interview by author. Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.



British for staving off the ‘backward’ and segregationist Boer Republics. Use of the English language was an important way of identifying with the British who symbolized justice and equality introduced a non-racial franchise.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, ‘American Negroes’ were not only proud of their English, but many demanded that their children learn English. When Edward Gow, son of Frances M. Gow, and Bethel A.M.E.’s assistant secretary suggested at a board meeting that “Dutch preaching take place once in every month,” Mr. Andrew Erasmus,” a Coloured man was against the idea, “saying that services should not be conducted ‘like a mission.’”<sup>93</sup> For many of the Coloured elite, Dutch, particularly its local dialects, was considered inferior to English. It appears that Erasmus considered Gow’s suggestion to be patronizing.

The A.P.O was even more hostile towards Dutch. Two-thirds of the A.P.O.’s official organ, the *APO*, was written in English with only the last few pages written in various forms of Dutch, and in Afrikaans after its standardization in 1909. *Straatpraatjes*, one of the regular columns found among the back pages of the *APO* was written in the Cape Vernacular Afrikaans spoken by working class Coloureds in Cape Town’s inner city. Satirical in nature, *Straatpraatjes* was aimed at Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds. It followed the characters Piet and Stoffel through their adventures in Cape Town—dinner parties, picnics, parliamentary sessions, etc. Piet, who could only speak Afrikaans, was portrayed as being unsophisticated while Stoffel had only a basic understanding of English, which allowed him to lead Piet through the world of Cape high society. Though the A.P.O. claimed to be an organization of the Coloured people and promoted Coloured race pride, it was most concerned with the interests of the elite and used *Straatpraatjes* and Afrikaans as a bridge between itself and the Coloured masses. *Straatpraatjes* was also used to emphasize what the A.P.O. felt was the importance of English—the language of liberalism, ‘civilization’, and the British Empire—to Coloured modernity.<sup>94</sup>

The ‘American Negro’ community was an important model of English-speaking blacks, and many Coloureds, elite and working class, marveled at the ease with which they spoke English and the peculiarity of the ‘American’ accents. The docking of the *Boise* and its African-American sailors was the topic of an article aimed at young Coloured boys and girls in the *Cape*

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<sup>93</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Board Meeting Minutes, 10 May 1900.

<sup>94</sup> Adhikari, “‘The Sons of Ham,’” 5-6.

*Standard*.<sup>95</sup> “Isn’t it nice to meet nice intelligent men from other parts of the world? I liked to listen to them speaking in their (uncommon to our ears) American way. Of course, many of you would have been puzzled at times, but it was novel and musical to listen to.” Though they were often indistinguishable from Bantu-speaking Africans, their command of English immediately identified them as “civilized” and “educated.” A grandson of Frances McDonald Gow recalled that, “it was the way they [West Indians and Americans] conducted themselves and how they spoke. They were regarded as superior in spite of them being black.”<sup>96</sup> The son of another Afro-Caribbean immigrant agreed: “Ja, they were educated, they taught people. Where Americans were concerned we go out of our way. They were accepted because of their accent... It was magical to hear an American speak, man.”<sup>97</sup> Gow’s grandson added, “sadly, we would accept an African American before we would accept an African. The connotation is that the African American was more civilized.”<sup>98</sup>

In addition to being fluent and literate in English, it is likely that many African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town had received some sort of basic education, perhaps even at an advanced level, which made them appear all the more ‘civilized’ in the eyes of Coloureds. Though education was an important step towards progress in all societies, it—especially formal education—was also an important symbol of status and served to distinguish the enlightened from those of a dimmer wit. Education was a particularly emotive issue for Coloureds who had grown increasingly wary of the government’s education policies, which, by the beginning of the twentieth century had legalized much of the schooling system’s de facto racial segregation. Angry that their children would not be given the full advantages of a decent education and therefore be rejected as equal members of ‘civilized’ society, the APO became the leading voice of Coloured discontent.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “Our Visitors,” *The Cape Standard*, 22 November 1938.

<sup>96</sup> Donald Kleinsmidt, Personal interview by author. Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.

<sup>97</sup> William Walker, Personal interview by author. Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Donald Kleinsmidt, Personal interview by author. Athlone, Cape Town, 27 February 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, 30-34.

For the Coloured elite who often believed that command of the English language was itself a mark of high intelligence, 'American Negroes' were greatly admired. Those who paid close attention to 'American Negro' accounts of the Americas, however, may very well have been in awe of what must have seemed like miraculous educational feats. An article by A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin in the *South African Spectator* would have been enough to convince Coloureds that African-Americans, while dodging angry white lynch mobs, were practically devouring books and learning in the U.S. Under the dramatic and Biblical heading "The Fetters Burst Asunder," Coppin told readers that, "as soon as the fetters were broken from their bodies, the work of emancipating their mind began. It is mind and not muscle that rules the world." Coppin then listed a number of impressive statistics demonstrating that in the U.S. "the freedman has made commendable progress in the right direction." It would have appeared that African-Americans had wasted no time in fortifying their minds, and in Cape Town where black education appeared to be facing a regression, 'American Negroes' were probably akin to celebrities.

Though the educational opportunities for the black masses in the Caribbean and the United States were hardly as shining as Coppin's article suggested, there had been several important advancements.<sup>100</sup> A number of black institutes of higher education had opened their doors in the late nineteenth century. And the world-famous Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama was opened in 1881 under the leadership of Booker T. Washington who had attended Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, which opened in 1868. In the Caribbean, the 1878 Education Act and the Bree Commission Report of 1896 called for compulsory education in Barbados for working-class children under twelve years of age.<sup>101</sup> And with the help of funding from the Mico Trust, schools were opened in Trinidad, Demerara (Guyana), the Bahamas, and St. Lucia and training colleges were opened in Jamaica and Antigua. In the West Indies, in general, there was a significant increase in black students enrolled in schools between 1860 and 1900, though the education was not of the highest quality.<sup>102</sup> Coloureds admired 'American Negroes' whose relative learnedness made them all the more 'civilized'. Their

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<sup>100</sup> Levi J. Coppin, "From Bondage to Freedom," *The South African Spectator*, 1 June 1901.

<sup>101</sup> Hilary Beckles. *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 138.

<sup>102</sup> Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 248-249.

education and the respect given them for it made them natural leaders in the Coloured community and partially accounts for what Alan Gregor Copley and Robert T. Vinson have shown to be their disproportionate representation in political organizations in Cape Town.<sup>103</sup>

Style of dress was another particularly important aspect of 'civilization' which set 'American Negroes' and the Coloured elite apart. Bishop Coppin revealed the preoccupation with dress during his trip to Matabeleland. Having spent most of his time in South Africa confined to Cape Town, Bishop Coppin was eager to observe Africans in rural areas. He was especially attentive to the ways in which 'natives' dressed. "We are accustomed to speak of the Natives in blankets," he reported in his *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, "but the blanket itself is evidence that they have at least come within touch of civilization." Revealing, again, the 'American Negro' understanding of Africa as Eden, Coppin wrote that teenagers—like Adam and Eve—wore a "'fig leaf' of goat or sheep skin."<sup>104</sup> In one of the many photos Coppin published in *Observations*, a group of Bantu-speaking Africans is pictured in western attire, with the caption beneath them reading, "What education has already accomplished." Not only does Coppin imply that the young men and women in the photo did not receive education until they received an English education, but he also suggests that they have advanced beyond the other Africans featured in the book—with whom they differ only in clothing—whose photos are captioned as, "true child of the Bush," "native girl in full dress," "in native costume," and so on.<sup>105</sup>

Children and grandchildren of Cape Town's 'American Negro' community remembered them as being remarkably meticulous dressers, wearing coats and ties whenever possible. Barbadian seaman Will Braithwaith was said to be fond of ostentatious clothing when on land and wore "a Prince Albert coat, a tall silk hat, and neatly creased trousers. He always carried a cane."<sup>106</sup> The daughter of Robert Gonsalves remembers the men as being "posh" and recalled

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<sup>103</sup> See Alan Gregor Copley, "'Far From Home': The Origins and Significance of the Afro-Caribbean Community in South Africa to 1930," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 1992): 349-370; Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans."

<sup>104</sup> Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, 74.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 45, 75, 79.

that they even wore suits and ties at picnics.<sup>107</sup> The granddaughter of H. W. Jones remembers that he wore a suit even when gardening.<sup>108</sup>

Along with their fancy dress, many 'American Negroes' cloaked themselves in what they considered to be the finest aspects of western culture. In line with the A.M.E.'s post-war policies towards freed blacks in the U.S., many of Cape Town's 'American Negroes' purchased pianos for their homes as symbols of their appreciation for the 'finer' arts. Afro-Barbadian Joseph Orderson was typical of 'American Negro' fathers. He was remembered as a strict man who often spoke about education. Like other 'American Negroes', he purchased a Zimmerman piano and made his son take lessons while he sat in the distance and watched. When his son played the wrong key, Mr. Orderson would tell the tutor to hit him.<sup>109</sup>

'American Negroes' were also admired for their athletic prowess, which was an important symbol of their progress in the modern western world. 'American Negroes' and most other blacks in the city were fond of Joe Louis, and according to the daughter of one Jamaican immigrant, "the town would go wild whenever he won."<sup>110</sup> The *Cape Standard* article devoted to the African-American sailors on the Boise marveled, "From all accounts these young sailor men are also sportsmen... they have much to tell of the Coloured men, Jesse Owens and Hayes, the world's champion athletes, and above all the boxing marvel, Joe Louis, who holds so many championships. Now haven't these Yankee boys much to be proud of. [sic] When they spoke of these world-famed sportsmen, it made me feel I'd like one day to see our boys and girls in South Africa putting up records that will demand attention of the world's sportsmen."<sup>111</sup>

Coloureds may have also looked to 'American Negro' cosmopolitanism as evidence of their admission into the modern western world. Many African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans had traveled to several continents as sailors or missionaries. A granddaughter of Afro-Jamaican

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<sup>106</sup> Harry Dean, *Umbala: The Adventures of a Negro Sea-Captain in Africa and on the Seven Seas in his Attempts to Found an Ethiopian Empire, an Autobiographical Narrative by Captain Harry Dean*, London: Pluto Press, 1989, 90.

<sup>107</sup> Florence Sals, personal interview by author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 9 March 2003.

<sup>108</sup> Hilda Phillips, phone interview by author, 5 March 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Derra Orderson, personal interview by author, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, 27 March 2003.

<sup>110</sup> Agnes Absalom, Personal interview by author. Landsdowne, Cape Town, 17 March 2003.

<sup>111</sup> "Our Visitors," *The Cape Standard*, 22 November 1938.

and retired hotel chef Henry Wilford Jones recalls being told that her grandfather once cooked in a hotel in Rhodesia.<sup>112</sup> Fellow Jamaican Amos Absalom traveled to Japan, England, and France during his stint with the U.S. Navy.<sup>113</sup>

For their part, ‘American Negroes’ appear to have been encouraged by Cape Town’s Coloured elite as they were a class with which ‘American Negroes’ could identify because they were black but not African, and western, but not European. And, for ‘American Negro’ missionaries and those others who anticipated Africa’s redemption, Coloured’s acceptance of western values was a source of great hope.

Transatlantic travel was critical to the identity of Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans in Cape Town. Although life in the Americas left blacks with an identity that stemmed from their common ‘otherness’ as descendants of Africans in a modern western society, the journey taken by ‘American Negroes’ back across the Atlantic to Cape Town did not reverse this effect and allow them to merge effortlessly back into the African landscape. It instead, emphasized the syncretism of their identities, which were forged in the West. By returning to Africa, ‘American Negroes’ reinforced their original separation from Africa. In Africa, descendants of Africans taken to the Americas were conspicuous not by their skin as they were in the Americas, but by the degree to which they had appropriated aspects of the dominant white European culture in the Americas. So thorough was their westernization, that many blacks from the Americas viewed Africa no differently than their white colonialist contemporaries. While visiting the compounds surrounding the diamond mines in Kimberley, African-American Mamie Edwards of the Virginia Jubilee Singers saw the harsh and highly restrictive living spaces of the black miners not with empathy, but with a firm conviction that the housing compounds were a justified means of preventing Africans from stealing diamonds. She saw the men behind the fences as only a detached westerner could—as “a very good and generous kind of creature.” As Veit Erlmann notes, she was in agreement with most other English-speaking colonialists who admired subjugated Africans as noble savages—an image which, interestingly enough, she propagated through the minstrel tunes she performed with the Jubilee Singers.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Hilda Philips, Phone interview by author. 5 March 2003. Henry Wilford Jones, Death Register, South Africa State Archives, Cape Town Repository.

<sup>113</sup> Absalom, Agnes. Phone interview by author. 7 March 2003.

It is likely that ‘American Negroes’ were never as western in the Americas as they were while in Africa. In Africa, in the presence of indigenous Africans, ‘American Negroes’ were no longer identified simply by their common African heritage, but by their common westernization. Their black faces were merely dressing. In Africa, ‘American Negroes’ were westerners before they were anything else, and this, according to Cape society, made them superior and almost white. Similar to those African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans who colonized Liberia and became black western elites, ‘American Negroes’ became their most western selves in Africa. Nevertheless, they were still black, and along with the Coloured elite, had to occupy a tenuous position being too western to be African and too African to be completely western.

Many, though not all, ‘American Negroes’ physically appeared to be no different than other Bantu-speakers in and around Cape Town. Vincent Kolbe, a childhood playmate of a number of the children of Afro-Caribbean and African-American settlers, writes that, “Although they were classified as Coloured and did not have to live in locations, they looked African.”<sup>115</sup> Afro-Jamaican Henry Wilford Jones was described as a ‘native’ in the death registry.<sup>116</sup> And, though they were unlikely to have drawn racial distinctions between themselves and Africans, African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans generally resented being confused with Africans who enjoyed very few rights in the city—and in South Africa, in general—and who ‘American Negroes’ considered to be less civilized than they. It was in their interest to distinguish themselves from Africans, and ‘American Negroes’ often harped upon their relative ‘civilization’ in order to do so.<sup>117</sup> In 1896 J. Ross who worked with the Netherlands Railway Company in Transvaal feared that all blacks would be “placed on a level with the raw, savage, totally uneducated aborigine, by being compelled to wear a badge on the left arm.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Erlmann, “‘A Feeling of Prejudice,’” 340.

<sup>115</sup> “Favourite Photograph-Vincent Kolbe,” loose photocopy, 1996, District Six Museum Archives, Cape Town.

<sup>116</sup> Death Certificate, reg. no. W46, ref. to reg. 1752, 22.7.52, South Africa State Archives, Cape Town Repository.

<sup>117</sup> The camaraderie between ‘American Negroes’ and ‘civilized’ black South Africans was not peculiar to the experience of Coloureds and ‘American Negroes’ in Cape Town and there were a number of cases of ‘American Negroes’ communing with Africans who they considered their equal peers. Indeed the attitude of Cape Town’s ‘American Negroes’ was duplicated in Port Elizabeth by the African and American Working Men’s Union, which refused to play cricket with Africans because to do so would be beneath its members. André Odendaal, “South Africa’s Black Victorians: Sport and Society in South Africa in the Nineteenth Century”. Paper presented at University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, 1987, 11.

The images ‘American Negroes’ had of Cape Town and Coloureds was wrapped up in the ways they viewed themselves as westerners in relation to Africa, that ‘primitive’ point from which they believed they had progressed. For most nineteenth century blacks in the Americas, Africa was a fallen paradise, a once-glorious land now engulfed by darkness, unbearable heat, heathenism, laziness, and evil—all of those attributes so repulsive to Christianity and so characteristic of the Christian hell. In his *Glimpses of the Ages*, Afro-Jamaican Theophilus Scholes argued that much of European civilization evolved from that of Africa—namely Egypt. At the same time, however, he concedes to Africa’s inferiority by claiming that Europe was once as backward as contemporary Africa.<sup>119</sup> As the descendants of African slaves, they believed that slavery prepared them to redeem the ‘Dark Continent’ of their ancestors. Thus, the fallen Africa was simultaneously a place of black rebirth, a land that would once again be flooded with light. As the belief went, ‘American Negroes’ were destined to rejuvenate Africa when they returned home from the Americas with the blessings of ‘civilization’. These returning sons and daughters of Africa would bring the tools of westernization—Christianity, European dress, and English—with them and would set about transforming Africa, molding it into modernity. Africa, they believed, would once again be great.

It is noteworthy that one of the metaphors most often employed by African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans is that of Africa as the Biblical Garden of Eden. A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner referred to Boporo as ‘the Eden of West- Africa’ and African-American Alexander Crummell marveled at “this Eden-like spot” when he arrived in Sierra Leone.<sup>120</sup> As nineteenth century Christians, they would have been able to identify all of the major Edenic characteristics and forces in Africa: innocence, evil, nakedness, temptation, beauty, opportunity, and idleness. The image of Africa, like the Garden, was one of stark contrast; it was imagined to be both sinless and sinful.

It is quite plausible that Adam and Eve’s original sin cast a pall over the Garden in the imagination of nineteenth century Christians. In this way, Eden symbolized both good and evil—

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<sup>118</sup> E. de Waal, “American Black Residents and Visitors in the S. A. R. Before 1899.” *South African Historical Journal* 6 (1974): 52-55, 54.

<sup>119</sup> Bryan, *The Jamaican People*, 251.

<sup>120</sup> Turner, *Respect Black*, 119; Wilson Jeremiah Moses. *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 90.



God and Satan. While the popular image of Eden tends to be one of peace and tranquility, it must have occupied a precarious position in the minds of Christians because the image also encompassed the inevitable fall from grace. For African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans, to refer to Africa as Eden suggests that they viewed it as both a land of promise and of damnation. As A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin wrote of the dual role, in Eden, “man walked with God, and there he lost His favor. There Judaism looked into heaven and Pagan philosophy investigated the earth. There the first great empires arose, and there the first kingdoms were destroyed. There ended life under the old Dispensation, and there began life under the new.”<sup>121</sup>

For African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans, Africa was the origin of their inferiority and the source of their ‘otherness’ in the Americas; it was also their hope for a better future. Africa, they believed, like them, would need to be ‘civilized’ in order to be redeemed. Edward Wilmot Blyden articulated his desires for Africa to an audience at the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the American Colonization Society in 1890. Blyden implored his listeners to follow him into “imagination to witness the creation or development on that distant shore” of Africa. What follows first is an image of Africa without ‘American Negroes’, and then Blyden’s fanciful account of Africa after the ‘civilizing’ effect of blacks from the Americas.

Going from the coast through those depressing alluvial plains which fringe the eastern and western borders of the Continent, you reach, after a few miles’ travel, the first high undulating country, which, rising abruptly from the swamps, enchants you with its solidity, its fertility, its verdure, its refreshing and healthful breezes. You go further and stand upon a higher elevation where the wind sings more freshly in your ears, and your heart beats faster as you survey the continuous and unbroken forests that stretch away from your feet to the distant horizon [...] You hear no human sound and see the traces of no human presence [...] You wonder when and how are those vast wildernesses to be made the scene of human activity and to contribute to human wants and happiness. [...]

Blyden continues:

After a few years—a very few it may be—you return to those scenes. To your surprise and gratification your progress is no longer interrupted by the inconvenience of bridle-paths and tangled vines. The roads are open and clear. You miss the troublesome creeks and drains which, on your previous journey, harassed and fatigued you. Bridges have been constructed [...]. The gigantic trees have disappeared, houses have sprung up on every side. As far as the eye can see roofs of comfortable and homelike cottages peep through the wood. The waving corn and rice and sugar cane, the graceful and fragrant coffee tree, the umbrageous cocoa, orange, and mango plum have taken the place of the former sturdy denizens of the forest. What has brought about the change? The Negro emigrant has arrived from America, and, slender though his facilities have been, has produced these wonderful revolutions. You look beyond and take in the forests that now appear on the distant horizon. You catch glimpses of native villages embowered in plantain trees,

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<sup>121</sup> Coppin, “From Bondage to Freedom,” *The South African Spectator*, 1 June 1901.

and you say these also shall be brought under civilized influences, and you feel yourself lifted into manhood, the spirit of the teacher and guide and missionary comes upon you [...]. It is a thrill which you can never forget [...]. In that hour you are born again. You hear forevermore, the call ringing in your ears, 'Come over and help us.'<sup>122</sup>

Most fascinating about Blyden's image of a 'civilized' Africa is the manner in which it appears as a triumph over what Blyden depicts as the burdensome and overgrown, but natural African landscape. The "Negro emigrant," his listeners learn, has conquered the very essence of Africa.<sup>123</sup> They have subdued the African wilderness. It is also remarkable that at the height of the industrial revolution, Blyden's image of 'civilized' Africa has no factories, but looks rather like a mega-Plantation with fancy slave quarters. Perhaps, Blyden was simply catering to his largely white American Colonization Society audience, but it is just as likely that he was seeing Africa through western eyes.

And, though most of Cape Town's 'American Negroes' arrived in the city without having thought much of the role they and their countrymen could play in Africa, it is likely that they did imagine Africa, and that their view of Africa was similar to that of other westerners. For them Africa would have been engulfed in a darkness only broken by the light emanating from European colonies. That they were relieved to have found that Cape Town was home to an enclave of brown westerners should be of no question. The African-American sailors aboard the U.S.S. Boise were definitely impressed by Cape Town and its Coloured community and were reported to have admitted, "that their impressions of South Africa were entirely wrong: instead of meeting a backward semi-barbaric community they were surprised and pleased to find Coloured people who compared well with the most intellectual negroes in the States."<sup>124</sup>

An interesting, but subtle, contrast can be drawn between the experiences of Cape Town's 'American Negroes' and Liberia's Americo-Liberians. The defining moment in Liberian history came on 1 December 1822, only months after the colony was formally established, when African-American Matilda Newport heroically lit a cannon with a smoldering coal from her pipe,

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<sup>122</sup> Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Black Spokesperson: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, Edited by Hollis R. Lynch (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1971), 48-49.

<sup>123</sup> Though Blyden later questioned the ability of blacks from the Americas to effect positive change in Africa, he was responsible for settling 346 blacks from Barbados in Liberia. Among them were the Barclay family, which contributed two of Liberia's Americo-Liberian presidents. See Bethwell A. Ogot, *Africa and the Caribbean* (Kisumu: Ayange Press Ltd., 1997), 31.

<sup>124</sup> "Our Visitors," *The Cape Standard*, 22 November 1938.

forcing hostile 'natives' to flee.<sup>125</sup> In Cape Town 'American Negroes' did not need to scatter the 'natives'; they were already in Uitvlugt. And 'American Negroes' in Cape Town did not need to build the foundations of a 'civilized' black community. The Coloured community, a tell-tale sign of European influence, was evidence that 'civilization' already had a foothold in Cape Town, which was, after all, still Africa.

Had the Boise's black sailors remained in Cape Town permanently they, like the city's 'American Negro' community, would have been inclined to interact almost exclusively with the Coloured community. Like almost all of the 'American Negro' men in Cape Town, they probably would have married Coloured women. This, of course, would have been partially attributable to the fact that by the early twentieth century most Africans had been removed from Cape Town. It has also to do with the fact that 'American Negroes' were most likely to have considered Coloureds their equals, and as blacks in American and South African society where white supremacy was so entrenched, they were likely to have found fair-skinned black women-Coloureds- especially attractive. Ralph J. Bunche was particularly fond of the Malay women.<sup>126</sup> Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams spent almost all of his time in Coloured circles. J.R. Hooker notes that it is likely that "a West Indian found these black Europeans more intelligible and their complaints more obvious than those of the indigenous inhabitants of the eastern Cape Province... One is inclined to wonder if so determinedly a British person could very readily identify with traditional Africa when seen up close."<sup>127</sup>

To be certain, Cape Town and Coloureds were not so familiar in their westernization that 'American Negroes' did not feel like outsiders. Though many Afro-Caribbeans would have been familiar with the city's British aesthetics and the tripartite social system, many African-Americans were not. Like Ralph Bunche who marveled in 1937 that the blacks in Cape Town were, "so mixed up here that the place looks like Harlem," many African-Americans, save perhaps those from Harlem, would not have been so accustomed to such a large population of mixed-raced individuals.<sup>128</sup> During his interview with the South African Native Affairs

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<sup>125</sup> George W. Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers Inc., 1941) 19.

<sup>126</sup> Bunche, *An African American in South Africa*, 81

<sup>127</sup> Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams*, 73.

Commission in 1903 A.M.E. Rev. Allen Henry Attaway, remarked about “the large number of half-caste people you have got here in this place.”<sup>129</sup> Henry McNeal Turner may have spoken for most Black Americans and probably a number of West Indians who would have only been accustomed to a small Coloured community when he described race in Cape Town in 1898:

Here is mongrelization to the hearts content—all colors, shades, hues, dress, language, habits, and modes. The white man, with his many varieties of race. English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Malays, Mongolians, Hottentots, Kaffirs, Fingoes, Zulus, Basutoes, and other African tribes or nationalities. But the Africans here are not generally as black as [in] the tropics by any means. The Hottentots are the oldest. They were evidently here long ages before any other race. They are not blacks but clayish yellow. The Hottentots are an old, defunct race, who are dying out, and like our American Indian, will soon be extinct. Every form of marriage and intermarriage go on here, it appears, except among white ladies. They seem to stick to their race. But white men marry all colors when they get ready, even to the Hottentot women. Yet some of them look mighty well when they are properly dressed. Children are abundant of every hue and shade. The black people are known as natives, occasionally referred to as Negroes and colored people. One class of mixed bloods are known as bastards by those of darker hue. Race prejudice exists here, however, among the whites, but it is not alone confined to the Negro, as in the United States, but all of the colored races, Malays, Mongolians, etc., come in for a share.<sup>130</sup>

And Cape Town was still unlike the Caribbean and the Americas in that the boundaries dividing the racial groups, though hardening, were still relatively fuzzy. Both Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans were likely to have cast a doubtful eye upon the large numbers of what Bunche called, “swarthy, frizzly-haired, ‘suspicious looking’ ‘white’ people” living in Cape Town.<sup>131</sup> And it is likely that both Afro-Caribbeans would have agreed with the African-American sailors on the U.S.S. *Boise* when they remarked that the tempo of South African music was a bit on “the slow side,” and that they were used to “hot music.”<sup>132</sup>

‘American Negro’ interaction with Cape Town’s Coloured community often involved criticism and patronization. Because ‘American Negroes’, particularly representatives of the A.M.E. church, considered Coloureds to be the most progressive of the city’s black population, they were particularly critical of Coloured attitudes that they believed impeded their entrance

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<sup>128</sup> Bunche, *An African American in South Africa*, 53.

<sup>129</sup> *South African Native Affairs Commission*, Vol. 2, 266.

<sup>130</sup> Henry McNeal Turner, “Picturesque Cape Town and its Queer People: Bishop Turner Writes Interestingly of the Sights and Peculiarities of the South African City---Population of All Shades and Colors and Many Languages,” *Voice of Missions*, 1 June 1898.

<sup>131</sup> Bunche, *An African American in South Africa*, 63.

<sup>132</sup> “Our Visitors,” *The Cape Standard*, 22 November 1938.

into western modernity. Aware that, in the eyes of many members of the Coloured elite, they were paragons of western 'respectability' and eager to aid in the westernization of Africa, many 'American Negroes' fancied Cape Town as their western niche in Africa and Coloureds as their young western acolytes. With Bethel A.M.E. at the forefront, Cape Town's 'American Negroes' esteemed themselves and their American countrymen as black trailblazers leading the black world "from bondage to freedom."<sup>133</sup>

Interestingly, perhaps the greatest concern voiced by 'American Negroes' was the gulf that was growing between Coloureds and Bantu-speakers and the Coloured elite's pandering to the city's European population. It appears, while 'American Negroes' identified with Coloureds because they were western, they were often unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with the permeability of the boundary that separated blacks from whites and the Coloured elite's disdain for Bantu-speakers. Indeed this would explain the West Indian and American Association's exclusion of their treasurer Afro-Caribbean J. Daniel because he had, in the words of African-American immigrant Thomas Scott's son, "crossed the border."<sup>134</sup> Ironically, it would appear that though 'American Negroes' were most western in the Cape, they also became more aware and more comfortable with the boundary that separated them racially from whites. They believed that they were becoming western in their own right; they did not have to rub elbows with whites in order for them to adopt the 'civilized' ways of whites.

This difference in racial outlook led many 'American Negroes' to feel as though they had an advantage over the Coloured elite who they felt were generally more 'civilized' than Bantu-speaking Africans on account of their European language and culture, but lacking in black racial feeling, misled by whites, and were felt to not be as 'civilized' as 'American Negroes'. Such sentiments appear to have encouraged a certain level of 'American Negro' superciliousness. This, of course, had much to do with the fact that the center of Cape Town's 'American Negro' community was Bethel A.M.E.—a black missionary church.

The comments of two prominent African-American visitors to the city in the 1930s suggests that, theoretically at least, 'American Negroes' may not have always been comfortable with Cape society and the ever-widening gap between Coloureds and Africans. In 1936, the

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<sup>133</sup> Levi J. Coppin, "From Bondage to Freedom," *The South African Spectator*, 1 June 1901.

<sup>134</sup> Leslie Scott, Personal interview by author. Athlone, Cape Town, 6 March 2003.

African-American wife of Frances H. Gow, Louise Beatrice Gow, reported to the Bethel A.M.E. board about a recent visit of Eslanda Robeson to the church. "Among other things Mrs. Robeson said, continued Mrs. Gow, was that in America they encourage darker children in every sphere of life but in Africa its—first—the other way about."<sup>135</sup> A year later, Ralph Bunche was particularly biting in his assessment of Coloureds. "The colored group has no economic foundations at all—it is suspended between black and white. It has sacrificed much initiative, enterprise and aggressiveness by pursuing a double illusion (for all but the very few) of escape into the white race and faith in the continuance by the white man of the special status and privilege originally extended the bastard group. They have shied from black skins but yet expect to exploit their own dark skins by requesting special consideration from the whites. Very little progress among them—few business or professional men, no wealth, meagre property holdings, etc. Some day they will be whining at the tails of the Bantu, whom they have traditionally looked upon just as the white man looks on them—i.e., as inferiors."<sup>136</sup>

The criticism, it would seem, was that Coloureds, who African-Americans would have considered to be 'light-skinned Negroes', had distanced themselves from Bantu-speaking Africans, "dark-skinned Negroes', in order to be closer to whites. And, to Bunche, their attitude was all the more offensive because he felt that they were simply not accomplished enough as a community to be so exclusive. Robeson and Bunche- himself often mistaken for white- were unimpressed by what they considered to be fair-skinned blacks looking down upon other blacks. What they either did not know, did not understand, or simply disagreed with was the fine distinction between race, class, and color in the United States and the same in the Cape. Though both African-Americans and Coloureds had assimilated into white western society to a large degree, the Coloured elite were considered, in Cape Town, to be racially distinct from Bantu-speaking Africans and closer to Europeans. It is likely that many African-Americans in Cape Town, though thoroughly westernized themselves, faulted Coloureds for so consciously identifying with Europeans before identifying with Bantu-speaking Africans. A.M.E. Bishop Levi J. Coppin noted it did not "dawn upon the 'Cape coloured people'" that they were wrong to have "classed themselves as white" until they were treated no different from Africans during the

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<sup>135</sup> Bethel A.M.E. Official Board Meeting Minutes, 8 July 1936.

<sup>136</sup> Bunche, *An African American in South Africa*, 67-68.

outbreak of Bubonic plague, and as segregation in the city mounted. “In all cases where they had been permitted to more nearly approach the European in social life than their Native half brother of darker hue,” he wrote, “it was only by toleration.”<sup>137</sup> Coppin was particularly disturbed by what he considered to be Coloured acquiescence to white authority. “Until within a very few years, it was considered by the colored people themselves the most inexcusable presumption for a Native or Colored man to presume to preach. It is needless to say that the idea was not original, but borrowed from their white tutors...”<sup>138</sup> The A.M.E. Church, Coppin believed, was crucial in redirecting the focus of “misled” Coloureds from their European “tutors” to communion with or leadership of their African brethren. To Coppin and other African-Americans, the major racial divide was between blacks and whites; those who crossed or stayed too close to that boundary were betraying the race.<sup>139</sup>

To African-Americans, Cape Town Coloureds were simply ‘light-skinned Negroes’ who, as was the case in the U.S., were disproportionately represented among ‘civilized’ blacks. For them Coloured was not a race; it was a lightness in skin color that could often predict level of westernization. To them, Coloured attitudes towards Bantu-speaking Africans was arrogant because they considered Coloureds and Africans to be the same race. Frances H. Gow’s only child who was raised in Virginia in the United States recalls, Coloureds being “very snooty” when she lived in the city before 1939.<sup>140</sup> Such an understanding of Coloureds led Coppin to proclaim that, there were really only two classes in Cape Town—Coloured and white, and, “as fast as the natives are civilized and educated they must take their place in the great mass of people who are denominated ‘coloured’ to distinguish them from ‘European’... The native is but a temporary classification and cannot endure only to the extent that the native is kept away from civilizing influences.”<sup>141</sup> This line of thinking followed from the beliefs of the A.M.E. Church and black elites in the U.S. who believed that, as ‘progressive’ blacks their duty was not to

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<sup>137</sup> Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, 31.

<sup>138</sup> Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, 98.

<sup>139</sup> Though it was not possible to uncover the class origins of Cape Town’s ‘American Negro’ community for this paper, it is likely that many ‘American Negroes’, save for those who came officially with the A.M.E. church, were not considered elite until they arrived in the city. This may explain their apparent disdain for what African-Americans called being “color struck”- showing a preference for fair skin.

<sup>140</sup> Frances Hermine Williams. Personal interview by author. Richmond, U.S.A, 9 January 2003.

<sup>141</sup> L.J. Coppin, *Letters from South Africa*. A.M.E. Philadelphia: 1905, 68.

abandon those considered less ‘civilized’, but to take charge of their advancement into the modern world. It would seem that African-Americans in Cape Town believed that the Coloured elite should serve as a model of ‘progress’ for lower classed Coloureds and Bantu-speakers.

Bishop Coppin credited the A.M.E. church for taking the initiative to unite Coloureds and Africans through the example it provided of black solidarity and independence and the integrated education it offered to the children of District Six at its Bethel Institute, which educated more than 300 students, including Malays, Coloureds, and Africans.<sup>142</sup> “The average person of mixed blood considers it a degradation to associate on the street, or sit in church or society with a Native man or woman,” Coppin wrote, “I can say, not only by my own observation, but upon the authority of many who have lived all their lives here, that previous to the coming of the A.M.E. Church, such a thing as the meeting together of Native and Coloured people upon terms of equality, either in social, business or religious life, was unknown and not considered a matter even within the realm of discussion.”<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, Bantu-speaking Africans were invited to commune with ‘American Negroes’ and Coloureds only on condition that they were deemed ‘civilized’. The fact stands that Africans who remained in Cape Town worshipped at their own church, Allen Temple A.M.E., under the leadership of Ethiopian church founder Mangena Mokone, while Coloureds and ‘American Negroes’ worshipped at Bethel.<sup>144</sup>

Perhaps the greatest efforts by ‘American Negroes’ towards uniting Coloureds and Bantu-speaking Africans in a collective struggle against a common source of oppression were made through the Industrial Commercial Workers Union (I.C.U.) and the United Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.).<sup>145</sup> Clements Kadalie, a Malawian immigrant, founded the I.C.U. in 1919 for Cape Town dockworkers. Committed to incorporating African and Coloured workers, the I.C.U. first emerged as a powerful new force in the labor world when it instigated a strike of two thousand workers in cooperation with the white Railway Workers Union in 1919 in

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<sup>142</sup> For more information on Bethel Institute, see the testimony of L.J. Coppin and A.H. Attaway in the South African Native Affairs Commission 1904-1905.

<sup>143</sup> Coppin, *Observations of Persons and Things in South Africa*, 107.

<sup>144</sup> *The South African Spectator*, 7 September 1901; 10 August 1901.

<sup>145</sup> A number of ‘American Negroes’ also became involved with the Non-European Unity Movement, which sought to unite Coloureds and Africans in collective struggle against apartheid.



order to prevent the export of food to Europe and the subsequent rise in local food costs.<sup>146</sup> The influence of Afro-Caribbean dockworkers in the union was apparent from the beginning. In 1920, the union elected two Afro-Caribbeans, A. James King and James Gumbs, as its president and vice-president respectively. Gumbs later served as the I.C.U. president from 1924 until his death in 1929. Another Afro-Caribbean Emmanuel Johnson, was Junior Vice-President.<sup>147</sup> By 1926, however, the I.C.U. had relaxed its commitment to Coloured-African unity, and for a variety of reasons including race, expelled its Coloured leadership.<sup>148</sup>

The U.N.I.A., founded by Afro-Caribbean Marcus Garvey in Jamaica, emerged in Cape Town from within the ranks of Afro-Caribbeans in the I.C.U. Clements Kadalie later recalled that the I.C.U.'s executive committee, "often had three or four of these Negroes [Afro-Caribbeans]. When the Marcus Garvey Movement was at its height, these Negroes in South Africa tried their best to use the I.C.U. as an auxiliary of the Universal Negro Improvement Association..."<sup>149</sup> British Guianan Timothy Robinson was particularly significant in founding the first three U.N.I.A. chapters in Cape Town. Robertson was President of the first recorded South African U.N.I.A. chapter, which was begun in Goodwood. The second chapter was founded by Afro-Caribbeans William O. Jackson, J. Casear Allen, Arthur Emile Watlington, and I.C.U. president James Gumbs. As Robert Vinson reveals, the U.N.I.A. in the greater Cape Town area encompassed Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Coloureds and the Cape Town branch worked in solidarity with the Cape African National Congress and the Cape Indian Council.<sup>150</sup>

The U.N.I.A. with its mantra of "Africa for the Africans" marked an important shift in the discourse of Cape Town's 'American Negroes' and Coloured elite, which previously held up full rights within the colonial society as the goal of modern blacks. The U.N.I.A. made the monumental call for the establishment of a black African empire, and the expulsion of European colonizers. For some 'American Negroes' and others the U.N.I.A. was a major setback in their

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<sup>146</sup> Clements Kadalie, *My Life and the ICU: the Autobiography of a Black Trade Unionist in South Africa*, Edited by Stanley Trapido (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970), 12; Goldin, "The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity," 164; Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans," 12.

<sup>147</sup> Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans," 13; Kadalie, *My Life and the ICU*, 220.

<sup>148</sup> Goldin, "The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity," 164.

<sup>149</sup> Kadalie, *My Life and the ICU*, 220.

<sup>150</sup> Vinson, "In the Time of the Americans," 21-23.

struggle to be accepted as equals by whites and the most vociferous opposition to the movement in Cape Town came from that group, which provided the leaders of the Garveyite movement—‘American Negroes’. Afro-Caribbean and A.M.E. Rev. Frances McDonald Gow felt so strongly about the U.N.I.A. that he wrote a letter to the British Consul General in New York rejecting any connection that may have been perceived between the A.M.E. Church and Garveyism.<sup>151</sup>

Interestingly, save for its insistence that blacks be the sole imperial powers in Africa, the U.N.I.A.’s message was essentially the same as that of the A.M.E. Church. Like the A.M.E. Church, the U.N.I.A. encouraged African-Coloured unity as a black race, promoted black independence, black unity, black racial uplift, and ‘American Negro’ leadership in a ‘backward’ Africa. Indeed U.S. Garveyite Rosetta Stenson could very well have been a colleague of Edward Wilmot Blyden when she proclaimed, “Let us go possess South Africa.”<sup>152</sup> As Gow remarked in an interview with the *Cape Argus*: “Unfortunately, he [Garvey] proceeded to advocate the establishment in Africa of a Republic for the purpose of supporting and upholding the black race... when he began to speak about trying to drive the white man out of Africa and establishing a Republic, we said he was going too far—that, in fact, he was going to impossible extremes. In this way Garvey alienated the sympathies of a good many of our people who were prepared to support the commercial project.” Indeed, where Bethel A.M.E. sought to create black Englishmen, the U.N.I.A. sought to replace white Englishmen with black Englishmen. Whereas the A.M.E. church and other black organizations in the Americas advocated African settlement and missionary work alongside Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.N.I.A. flatly condemned all European colonization of Africa and called for black ‘American’ colonization of the continent.

The U.N.I.A., though a departure from blanket support of European imperialism, was not successful in extricating itself from the paradigm of western modernity. Its goals remained true to the example set by Europe and followed by the A.M.E. church. This would explain why the U.N.I.A. was so easily adapted to operate within Cape Town’s emergent Coloured elite and

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<sup>151</sup>“African Empire Project: Garvey Repudiated, Religion and Politics,” *Cape Argus*, 17 September 1920.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in Hill, Robert A. and Gregory A. Pirio. “‘Africa for the Africans’: the Garvey Movement in South Africa, 1920-1940.” In *The Politics of Race Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, edited by Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The Regents of the University of California, 1987, 211.

‘American Negro’ communities. As Vinson has found, gatherings of the Claremont Chapter of the U.N.I.A. “held in meeting halls decorated in the U.N.I.A. colors of red, black and green, these gatherings featured piano, violin and vocal recitals, along with comic parodies and refreshments of ‘tea, cakes, fruit and minerals’. Such effete affairs provided a space for this aspirant elite to interact and the piano and violin recitals reflected a class-consciousness of a petty bourgeoisie.”<sup>153</sup> Thus, the disagreement among Cape Town’s ‘American Negroes’ about the U.N.I.A. was not terribly divisive, as they remained united in their support of Coloured-African cooperation and their advancement into western modernity.

The continued unity of ‘American Negroes’ in spite of the slight disagreement over Garveyism is apparent in the shared support base of the U.N.I.A., the I.C.U., Bethel A.M.E., the West Indian and American Association, and even the A.P.O. Afro-Caribbean U.N.I.A. members Robert Gonsalves, James William O. Jackson, J. Caesar Allen, and Arthur Emile Watlington were all members of the West Indian and American Association. Robert Gonsalves and James Lyner, and perhaps others, were also members of Bethel A.M.E. Lyner and U.N.I.A. stalwart Timothy Robertson were such good friends that Robertson raised Lyner’s four children when he was unable to care for them.<sup>154</sup> Marcus Garvey believed the I.C.U.’s official organ, *Black Man*, was the South African version of the U.N.I.A.’s *Negro World*, and the *Black Man* featured a column on the doings of the U.N.I.A. Garvey’s *Negro World* reprinted an A.P.O. article in 1920.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans,” 24-25.

<sup>154</sup> Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans,” 32-33.

<sup>155</sup> Vinson, “In the Time of the Americans,” 32-33, 16.

## Conclusion

The coalescence of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans- major groups within the unique and syncretic cultural sphere that Paul Gilroy calls the “Black Atlantic”<sup>1</sup> - is important in understanding the similarities underlying “Black Atlantic” cultures, and in Cape Town these commonalities found their greatest expression in the creation of a disparate ‘American Negro’ community that operated in tandem with the emergent Coloured identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Best described under the rubric of blacks in western modernity, the affinity between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in Cape Town is underlined by their common desire to reconcile with and insert themselves into a western world that is both home and place of exile. The unification of ‘American Negroes’ and Coloureds- particularly Coloured elites- who were embarking on their own western modernity project further illuminates this point and raises interesting questions about Coloured identity, and its relationship to African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and the “Black Atlantic.”

Like, the African elite, Coloured elites in Cape Town related to ‘American Negroes’ because they too had syncretic cultural practices and occupied analogous rungs on the hierarchies of a foreign western modernity and responded to their subjugation by attempting to ascend the western cultural ladder. Though I do not think that Coloureds fit easily into Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” because of its restriction to a segment of the African Diaspora and because of the unique history and legacies of Cape slavery and segregation, I do think that the emergence of a modern Coloured identity situated between the African and European populations in the late nineteenth century facilitated the Coloured elite’s appropriation of certain aspects of Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” experience and allowed it to function almost effortlessly within the “Black Atlantic” and to find common ground with the city’s ‘American Negro’ community. In this way, the scope of the “Black Atlantic” is given more flexibility and allowed to expand beyond the African Diaspora and cover those unique black cultures that transcend national boundaries and cross the Atlantic.

The breadth of a trans-Atlantic black world that, culturally, is neither African, European, nor American, is best appreciated when it is considered that a number of English-speaking and

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

westernized Africans also took part in the cross-Atlantic dialogue. These men, namely F.Z.S. Peregrino, became prominent members of the Coloured community not because they were racially mixed, but because they identified with Coloureds and 'American Negroes' as their peers. All of these men employed the image of progressive 'American Negroes' in a number of ways—from speaking with American accents to dressing flamboyantly. They were also eager to assist Coloureds in their modernization efforts.

In Cape Town, Gold Coaster F.Z.S. Peregrino epitomized this group. Like other black westerners, Peregrino supported the westernization of Africa. He marveled at the cricket matches being played in Uitvlugt, and, reminiscent of the Jubilee Singers' Mamie Edwards when she visited the diamond mine compounds, he claimed to have never seen "a more contented and a happier lot," than Africans in Uitvlugt. His only gripe about their living conditions focused on the flooring in their "huts," the mixing of "the more respectable" with the others and the lack of "enforcement of civilized methods of dress and the abandonment of the blanket."<sup>2</sup>

Peregrino's newspaper *The South African Spectator* was modeled after another of the same name, which he had created in Albany, New York, upon seeing that the blacks of the area "needed" such an organ. Purporting to have not even considered the *London Spectator*, Peregrino asserted that there was no better name for his newspaper, which was designed to, "look on and fearlessly and without favor comment on men and things."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in its banner, the *South African Spectator* proclaimed: "No public man so high as to be above the just criticism of the SPECTATOR." Likewise, the newspaper's masthead was adorned with an illustration of an all-seeing eye.

In a recurring feature called, "As Others See Us," Peregrino often printed letters from readers who praised the ability of the *Spectator* to guide wanton races out of the darkness. One American reader commented, "While in this country he [Peregrino] was found battling for weaker races and in far off Africa his energies are being spent towards the same end." The president of the William McKinley Normal and Industrial School of Virginia in the U.S. praised the paper for the ability of its omniscient eye peer "through darkness out into the light."<sup>4</sup> It comes as no surprise that many readers incorrectly thought that the *Spectator* was the organ of

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<sup>2</sup> "The Iron City," *The South African Spectator*, 20 April 1901.

<sup>3</sup> "What is in a Name?" *The South African Spectator*, 27 September 1902.

<sup>4</sup> "As Others See Us," *The South African Spectator*, 5 July 1902.

Bethel A.M.E., which shared its mission.<sup>5</sup> It should also be no shock that Mr. Oziah Henderson, an Afro-Caribbean member of Port Elizabeth's AAWMU was a correspondent with the *Spectator*.<sup>6</sup>

And, while Peregrino lamented the fact that he thought people in the United States and Britain were misled into thinking that all Capetonians were 'uncivilized- he feared that, "no discrimination would appear to be made between the uncivilized and benighted raw material, and the intelligent industrious and sober citizen, the efficient tradesman and businessman, of whom Cape Town furnish so pleasing a quota."<sup>7</sup> he too was concerned with helping Coloureds along the way to modernity. An article appeared in the *Spectator* about Peregrino shipping a boot-black's stand and a "modern barber chair" to Cape Town in order to "introduce American ideas in Cape Town."<sup>8</sup>

Most telling about the dialogue between westernized blacks in Cape Town is that most of their descendants are, today, considered to be Coloured- whether by personal choice or government mandate. The lives of these descendants speak volumes about the 'Black Atlantic'.

In 1948 Daniel Malan's Herenigde National Party and its ally the Afrikaner Party won a plurality of the 153 seats in the House of Assembly. Suddenly the segregation first instituted by the 'liberal' and 'nonracial' British had been confirmed as the beginning of a South African nightmare. What many 'American Negroes' saw as a land of opportunity had come under the leadership of a nationalist regime that advocated such virulent violence and racism that even a decade after its official demise, the country has not recovered.

In a not so surprising twist to a story that finds Cape Town Coloureds celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in the early twentieth century, the experience of Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" continued to resonate with Coloured Capetonians throughout the apartheid years. In an apparent effort to insert Coloureds into an African continuum with 'American Negroes' in 1959, Coloured historian R. E. van der Ross asserted that, "American Jazz and American 'Blues', the bases of coon music, are African in origin. They were developed on the cotton plantations of Dixieland

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<sup>5</sup> "Six Months Old! And Living," *The South African Spectator*, 15 June 1901.

<sup>6</sup> *The South African Spectator*, 29 June 1901; 5 October 1901.

<sup>7</sup> "W.A. Roberts," *The South African Spectator*, 14 January 1901.

<sup>8</sup> *South African Spectator*, 7 September 1901.

from the primitive rhythms of the African slave and in his soulful yearning for freedom. To-day the Negro is free, and his African brother's capering and singing may be nothing more than an annual emotion-filled expression of yearning for a freedom which he cannot find in the country he calls his own."<sup>9</sup>

With the fall of apartheid and the reentrance of South Africa into the international community, Coloured identification with the "Black Atlantic" appears to have intensified, particularly among the youth. Some have started searching for their African roots, and many have taken to proclaiming in a manner reminiscent of James Brown and the Black Power Movement, "I'm coloured and I'm proud!" U.S. and Caribbean music have become the principle means of youthful expression. And, though South African hip-hoppers are first to assert—in Afrikaans or a quasi-American accent—that theirs is done with a South African 'flava', their location in a distinct Coloured modernity, as opposed to that of the "Black Atlantic" remains questionable.

One cannot avoid seeing the irony in a young Coloured South African Rastafarian who is the great grandson of a Barbadian seaman and searches for his African "roots" in the Caribbean. Rastafarianism, which offered Afro-Caribbeans and other blacks in the Americas a black African God instead of a white Jesus and reconnected them with their ancestral homeland has become a popular sub-culture for some young Coloureds, and though it seems the most unlikely of religions for blacks who are already in Africa, it speaks volumes to the separation of Coloureds from Africa and to the ways in which this disconnect allows them to identify with 'American Negroes'.

History may not have been so lenient to the perception African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans have of Coloured South Africans. In 1951, in a scene that had been played out throughout the history of 'American Negroes' in South Africa, a Barbadian seaman whose ship was docked in the harbor came to the aid of black customers who were being harassed by a white policeman in a "Non-European" café. Like many 'American Negroes' before him, he took advantage of his role as a foreigner, to challenge racism in South Africa. Only this time, the policeman struck the seaman and arrested him. Two days later, he died in prison from a fractured skull. The policeman was found guilty of the killing and fined only £10, setting off a

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<sup>9</sup> R.E. van der Ross, *Coloured Viewpoint: A Series of Articles in the Cape Times, 1958-1965* by R.E. van der Ross, compiled by J. L. Hattingh and H. C. Bredekamp, 33.

wave of protests in the Caribbean. In 1955, Barbados, the largest contributor to Cape Town's Afro-Caribbean community and Jamaica, the third-largest, instituted the first international trade sanctions against the apartheid government.<sup>10</sup> The onset of apartheid and South Africa's exclusion from the international community effectively put an end to Coloured dialogue with the "Black Atlantic."

Because Coloured interaction with the "Black Atlantic" was largely confined to those 'American Negroes' in the city, the isolation of South Africa during apartheid to black visitors had a profound effect on Coloured communication with a larger black world. Not only had Coloureds never had much interaction with blacks residing in the Americas, but during apartheid, those few blacks in the Americas who were familiar with the Cape's Coloured community were likely to have a negative view of the community altogether. The daughter of Frances Herman Gow recounts a story of meeting Sidney Poitier in the United States. When he asked her where she was from, she replied that she was South African, he exclaimed, "are you Coloured?!" He then threw his arm to his head and walked away.<sup>11</sup> This is not to mention that the Coon Carnival, inspired by the antics of whites in tarred faces and in imitation of African-Americans, is a major event in the Coloured community. Though Coloureds are adamant that it is all done in fun, this does little to assuage the offense taken by visiting African-Americans. Insisting, as van der Ross did, that the Coon Carnival was inspired by 'American Negroes' only adds insult to injury.

And, though the camaraderie between 'American Negroes' and Coloureds appears to have declined significantly after its heyday at the turn of the century, the transatlantic chatter continues as Coloured youth identify with the experiences of the African Diaspora and search for a route to Africa through the Americas. And, should 'American Negroes' ever take notice again they might find that their comfort and discomfort with the Coloured identity is a reflection of their own ambivalence about Africa, western modernity, and themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> Cobley, "'Far From Home,'" 370.

<sup>11</sup> Frances Hermine Williams. Personal interview by author. Richmond, U.S.A, 9 January 2003.



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